Different Trajectories in State Formation in Greater Mesopotamia: A View from Arslantepe (Turkey)

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Abstract Long-term excavations at Arslantepe, Malatya (Turkey), have revealed the development, in the fourth millennium BC, of a precocious palatial system with a monumental building complex, sophisticated bureaucracy, and a strong centralization of economic and political power in a nonurban site. This paper reconsiders, in comparative terms, the main features and organization of the earliest states in Greater Mesopotamia. By looking at the social and economic foundations of the emergence of hierarchies and unequal relations, the dynamics and degrees of urbanization, and the role of ideology, I highlight the common aspects and the diversified trajectories of state formation and outcomes in three main core regions—southern Mesopotamia, northern Mesopotamia, and Upper Euphrates valley.

Keywords State formation · Greater Mesopotamia · Political economy · Social hierarchies · Urbanization · Arslantepe palace

Introduction

State formation has been one of the most interesting subjects in anthropology and archaeology for many decades, and the differing theoretical approaches that have been considered raise fundamental anthropological questions. How we approach the rise of the state as a global sociopolitical system raises questions about how we define and classify a state society, with the associated issue of the very legitimacy of

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the classification itself of types of society, rigidly defining the assemblages of features that characterize them, regardless of their specific historical and cultural background and developments. A second major theme—closely bound up with the former—is the question of the "genetic" linkage between different types of society and, consequently, the question of the modes, causes, and forms of social change.

The success of evolutionary theories and the later emergence of neo-evolutionism certainly gave rise to the widespread adoption of classification procedures in the social sciences in the last century and brought about the tendency to construct models of society and to recognize clearly defined breaks in the processes of social change, which could allow one to identify evolutionary steps and "periods of transition." A variety of theoretical and practical approaches linked to evolutionism, though with differing, sometimes divergent positions and perspectives, have marked the history of anthropology and archaeology over many decades (Childe 1950, 1951; Earle 1997; Flannery 1972; Fried 1967; Friedman 1979; Friedman and Rowlands 1977; Godelier 1977; Johnson and Earle 1987; Sahlins and Service 1960; Sanders 1974; Sanders and Price 1968; Service 1962, 1975; Steward 1955; Willey and Philips 1958). The New Archaeology in particular paved the way for an expansion of the evolutionist and processualist theories in archaeological practice, focusing increasingly on "primary" societies and their "origins" (Binford and Binford 1968; Flannery 1976; Flannery and Marcus 1983; Renfrew 1972; Wright 1977; Wright and Johnson 1975). Such concepts as *chiefdom* and *state* have become common and, whether we like it or not, have conditioned the debate on the birth and development of hierarchical societies and the so-called "social complexity"—a vague term that is of little use (Marcus 2008; Redmond and Spencer 2012; Wright 2006).

Criticism and reactions to evolutionist theories, which have become widespread in recent years, have rejected the validity of the classificatory approach, while attention—probably in relation to the prevailing contemporary thought in economics—has focused mainly on studying aspects of the "intentionality" and "rationality" of human actions, the role of agency, and symbolic behaviors (Dobres and Robb 2000; Dornan 2002; Hodder 1982, 1985; Pauketat 2001; Renfrew et al. 1993; Robb 2012; Saitta 1994).

Classifications and models, indeed, often fail to account for the complexity of human societies and the many different forms of social, economic, and political relations that are at the same time interwoven, harmonized, and colliding in the same communities. "Simple stage typology fails to account for variation among societies of similar complexity and scale," as Blanton et al. have suggested (1996, p. 1). At the same time, I believe that, while accepting that universal evolutionary models are oversimplified and implausible, the origins and reasons for change are to be found in the historical roots of each society, in the socioeconomic and political relations that had preceded changes. "All of the future exists in the past" (Capote 1948, p. 113).

I think we should give relevance to those dominant social and economic relations that shape societies and sometimes also push for change, searching for the historical causality of the phenomena, and at the same time not underestimating the dialectical relationship between the needs of individuals and social demands. By social

demands, I am not only referring to the demands of society as a whole for its survival and reproduction in systemic-functionalist terms, but also the sometimes conflicting needs of individual groups and social sectors within one and the same community (Bernbeck 2009). Societies are not monolithic and homogeneous wholes, and both *cooperation* and *competition* dialectically work in each society, dynamically pushing for conservation or change. By analyzing and understanding the nature of the dominant relations in each society, we can recognize their salient and characterizing features and ultimately build a variety of explanatory models, taking due account of the multiplicity and diversity of situations and evolutionary developments. As Braudel (1997a) has stated, "history" is not only the narration of events, which only reflect the "surface," but it must be "profound history," i.e., the history of man in the society. History (and I would add archaeology) is "explanation" and does not only analyze the life of individual men and communities, but, through the investigation of daily acts and minor and major events, it analyzes the collective life of all men; its main aim is not so much the narration of the past, but the "knowledge of man" (Braudel 1997b).

To overcome the idea of applying preconceived models that trace general evolutionary trends, the challenge for archaeologists today is to conduct pinpoint analyses of phenomena that occurred in specific time and space contexts on a new rigorous methodological basis, making use of the vast amount of new information that is increasingly gathered through field research, with the aim of providing evidence of specific developments and epoch-changing transformations in the history of societies, without relinquishing, however, the idea to go further and also attempt to understand dynamics of social change in a wider anthropological perspective.

Past models and concepts created in anthropology can be carefully reconsidered in this perspective (not necessarily discarded *a priori*), and new explanations can be derived from the observation of many different "formative" contexts. The study of specific "primary" situations that are wholly unknown to us can make it possible to reconstruct behaviors and dynamics of change that cannot or can only partly be known or predicted on the basis of what we know already from ethnographical or historical cases. If compared by maintaining the reference to their historical and environmental contexts, these different social realities can reveal mechanisms of social evolution and change in the specific historical and environmental contexts in which they occurred, giving rise to different possible pathways. By applying a "historical-ecological regional approach," as defined by Wilkinson et al. (2014), we may be able to achieve that "rehabilitation of social evolutionary theory" on new bases, as suggested by Yoffee (2005, p. 21) when he emphasized the need for an archaeological exploration of "the many trajectories of social change that are documented in the archaeological record and so explain the evolution of the earliest cities, states, and civilizations." If we eschew "classifying," while not renouncing "characterizing" (i.e., recognizing and explaining the structural aspects and causes of the phenomena without rigidly creating universally valid "types" of society), archaeology can acquire an enormous cognitive potential and also help progress in the study and theories of anthropology. Following Feinman (1998, p. 132), we might say that "An understanding of societal change and preindustrial states

requires much more than a single theory, evolutionary scenario, or set of prime movers…By endeavoring to offer bridges between history and process, this essay hopefully nudges us a small step along a long and complex road."

The topic of the origin of the state in the Mesopotamian world is an issue that is waiting to be discussed in these terms, by trying to analyze and stress the crucial regional and sociopolitical variability that is well attested by recent field research in the northern regions of Greater Mesopotamia, as well as the specific dialectical relations pushing change in early societies, albeit in the framework of closely related developmental processes and intense interregional relations.

My reason for explicitly expressing these considerations is to clarify the general approach I am using to address the problems concerning the processes and the many trajectories that gave rise to politically and economically centralized societies in Greater Mesopotamia and related areas (Fig. 1), starting from the results obtained at Arslantepe-Malatya, in the Upper Euphrates Valley. I try to point out the peculiarity of the developmental trajectory and outcomes observed at Arslantepe, by comparing them with the evidence from two other important fourth millennium core regions as represented by a few major sites: Uruk-Warka in Southern Mesopotamia and Tell Brak and Hamoukar in the Khabour basin of Northern Mesopotamia.
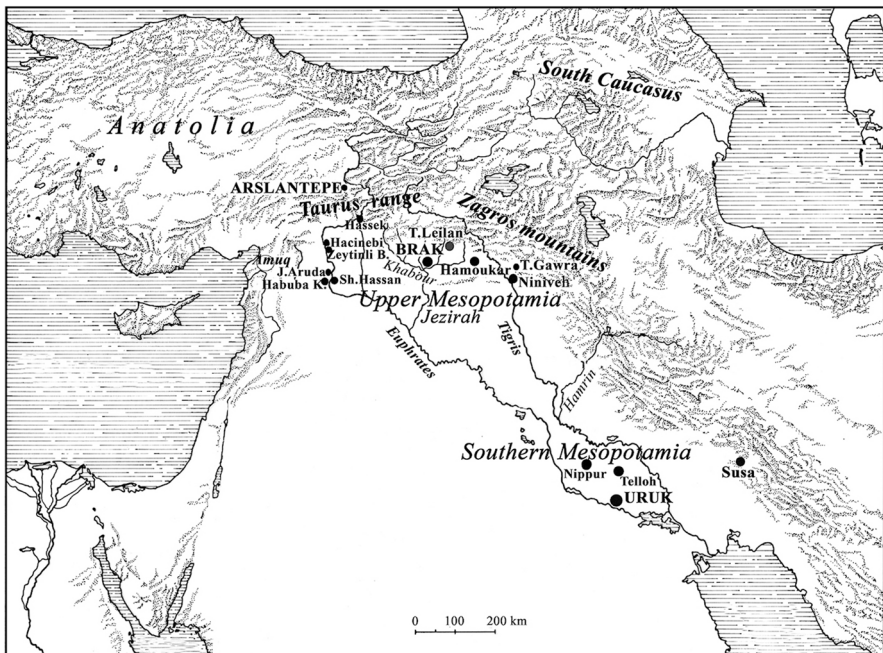

Fig. 1 Map of Greater Mesopotamia with fourth millennium sites mentioned in the text. Large urban sites are marked with larger dots

Some Key Concepts for the Analysis of State Formation in Greater Mesopotamia

Before analyzing the historical cases, I must necessarily also make a few brief preliminary remarks regarding certain key concepts that have been widely used to discuss the rise of state societies.

Chiefdom and State

While these definitions are still among the most commonly used benchmarks and often are still the main basis of the debate on the subject matter of this paper, their inadequacy for appropriately describing complex, varied, and internally nonuniform situations has been widely perceived, so that attempts have been made to nuance these categories to better characterize the multiplicity of societies they define. Chiefdoms, for instance, have been articulated into types—e.g., *simple* and *complex* (Wright 1984) or *minimal, typical, maximal* (Carneiro 1981, pp. 46–48). Various terms and definitions have been adopted for analyzing the many different forms of "pristine states," such as a*rchaic state* (Feinman and Marcus 1998) and e*arly state* as opposed to *mature state,* the latter subdivided by Claessen and Skalnìk (1978) into *inchoate early state*, *typical early state*, and *transitional early state*, which define evolutionary steps from early to mature states. This identification of different types of early states also highlights the delicate and critical problem of the distinction and relationship between chiefdom, state, and their various subcategories.

Notwithstanding the previously mentioned difficulty of reducing the complexity of historical realities to the generalizations of universal sociopolitical categories, the effort to identify distinctive features for each type of society has helped bring out crucial aspects that have become useful analytical tools, e.g., the degree of importance of kinship, community, political, or territorial ties in the governance of society; the type of economic relations; the nature and scale of social stratification; the role of administration and bureaucracy; and the role of religion and ideology.

In comparing Southern and Northern Mesopotamia and Eastern Anatolia, I look at all these factors, particularly referring to the nature of social change in connection with traditional social and economic relations, the environmental conditions influencing the economy, the organization of staple production, the dynamics of urbanization, and the ideological apparatus that supported the relations between the ruling elites and the population. I characterize and distinguish the different societies that I compare without attempting to attribute them to chiefdom, state, or other subcategory.

City and Urbanism

The extraordinary development of the power of central institutions and the organizational and production complexity of very large sites such as Uruk-Warka reveals the importance of a third conceptual category, which has been almost

invariably closely related to the notion of "state": I am referring to the category of "city," which has been widely used and abused. The emergence of this type of settlement and human aggregation, as we know, has been considered one of the distinctive features of state formation by many scholars, ever since the first reconstruction of the development of urban society by Childe (1950). As a result, the two concepts—city and state—have often been indissolubly linked as belonging to one and the same sociological category. But these two terms define different social and political realities, which, while in some cases overlapping, do not always refer to necessarily correlated phenomena. While Adams' (1966) use of "urban revolution" to describe a series of processes that led to the birth of the state is appropriate for Lower Mesopotamia, where the two phenomena were certainly very closely and structurally linked, there is no such correlation in other cases. Attempts to recognize different types of cities, including the proposal of "low-density urbanism" (Fletcher 2012), may certainly have helped account for the variety of situations recorded in archaeology and ethnology (Marcus and Sabloff 2008; Smith 2010; Yoffee 2014, 2015), but even in these cases the use of the term "urban" is not always fully justified. A community cannot be defined as a city purely on the basis of its population size or extension, though these are necessary requirements for characterizing it. The existence of cities entails a far-reaching transformation of the society in terms of kind of community aggregation, internal economic, social, and political relations, and its system of territorial organization.

While size is certainly one of the distinguishing features of an urban settlement (Ur 2014b), what really defines it is the association of large dimension with an internal articulation into differentiated, specialized, and interdependent parts (social and economic sectors, activities and services areas, political and religious sectors, etc.) (Fisher and Creekmore 2014, p. 4) and also a high level of internal specialization in terms of the distribution of political functions and tasks. Such a system leads to a very close involvement of the surrounding territory, based on a structural and not discontinuous relationship between the main center and neighboring sites, which can guarantee regular supplies to the specialized sectors and thereby make the territory an essential part of the whole integrated system. In this connection, Sherratt (2004, p. 101) has highlighted the fact that the "urban revolution" had a "transformative effect on the consumption habits of surrounding human population." For Sherratt (2004, p. 101), urbanization creates "new forms of consumption and goods that cannot be described simply as 'staples'… or 'prestige goods'… especially in the way in which this increasingly diverse range of products broke down the previous separation between different spheres of exchange." This emphasizes the phenomenon of the radical integration of a territory brought about by urbanization; it is not, in other words, only a matter of rural goods being transferred to the city and artisanal goods being transferred into the countryside according to a widely accepted view, but something much more profound that involves various types of interactions that combine and transform production and exchange relations. This vision also accounts for the observation made by Adams (1981), who, in his criticism of the Johnson (1975) model centered on the idea of clearly distinct functions of sites belonging to different size categories, noted the

presence of craft activities and workshops even in the small sites on the Mesopotamian alluvial plain.

Such an integrated system must necessarily have presupposed institutionalized and quite sophisticated forms of central government to manage these relations, in other words, the formation of a state-type system. But it is precisely the analysis of some Near Eastern societies that were among the most ancient and primary seats of the birth of the state and the city that has shown the contrary not always to be the case. It is precisely the existence or absence of urbanization that constitutes a crucial distinctive feature of various Near Eastern centralized political systems, which determined or influenced the birth, development, and/or collapse of the pristine states within Greater Mesopotamia, as research at Arslantepe has shown.

The achievement of economic and political centralization throughout Greater Mesopotamia in the second half of the fourth millennium BC must have led the political centers to establish close relations with the territory from which they extracted staple goods and labor, thereby probably starting to define the first political borders of these territories. This integration process must have been much more marked in urbanized contexts where the very close and systematic interaction between cities and their hinterland was indispensable for the survival not only of the power centers, but of the whole system of relations between all components of the population (Emberling et al. 2015).

What Do We Mean by "State" in Early Mesopotamia?

The political and economic integration of a complex whole of differentiated and sometimes conflicting sectors is a distinguishing feature of the structure of a state and, in some cases, as in Lower Mesopotamia, links both increasing urbanization and the gradual strengthening of a central political authority, which feed on each other. Factors such as social stratification and inequality, economic privileges, a complex administrative organization, the control of a common ideology that legitimizes rulers, which have been variously used to define the characteristics of the state and to distinguish it from less-structured sociopolitical formations (Claessen and Skalník 1978; Service 1975), also are recognizable, in various forms and to different degrees, in some pre-state societies classified as chiefdoms (Earle 1991, 1997; Kristiansen 1991). This is particularly evident in Mesopotamian societies, where economic privileges, social inequality, and the administrative control of resources seem to have existed as early as the first half of the fourth, and even the late fifth millennium BC in the late Ubaid period. In Mesopotamia, the need for a centralized administrative system emerged with the establishment of regular "redistribution" practices, based on the centralization of primary resources in various forms (offerings, tributes) in the hands of high-ranking individuals and their reallocation in public and elite environments. This system probably ensured an effective circulation of goods from the very first occupation of the southern alluvial plain. But this kind of economic control and coordination very soon led to high-status individuals being endowed with political and religious authority. In this part of the world, then, even though economic privileges originally appear to have been camouflaged by ideology, they were probably established almost from the beginning

of the occupation of the alluvium, very likely in association with a society of corporate communities characterized by hierarchical kinship relations and initial forms of centralized economic and political management in the hands of preeminent individuals (Frangipane 2007a; Ur 2014a). This is probably why Adams (2004, pp. 42–43) considered that there were no chiefdoms prior to states in southern Mesopotamia, arguing on the basis of his recognition of the existence of a codified redistribution system and "institutions" rather than simply "individuals of authoritative, chiefly status" from the fourth millennium onwards.

This shows the difficulty and the problematic character of using predetermined models and factors, or sets of factors, of the type described above to identify and distinguish the presence or absence of the "state" in widely differing and often highly complex societies. I believe it is necessary to look at the substantial changes toward the emergence of hierarchies and central power in Greater Mesopotamia as complex and varying phenomena also composed of conflicting interests in different conditions and responses to them (Bernbeck 2008, 2009).

Before we approach the analysis of socioeconomic and political formations that might be recognized as early state systems, I suggest that they should conform to a set of general criteria. They should have been highly politically integrated societies with a diversified range of components, stratified both horizontally (e.g., social groups, productive components, in some cases ethnic groups, various settlements in a territory) and vertically (e.g., hierarchically organized social categories, religious institutions, political and administrative hierarchies) (Wright 2006, p. 306; Yoffee 2005, p. 33). They also should be accompanied by a strong institutionalization of the authority, exercised by means of power delegation.

By institutionalizing the hierarchies, the centralized systems must certainly have strengthened them, hence fostering social stratification and inequality as well as the elite capacity to accumulate resources. But although the emergence of social and economic privileges must have been the necessary basis for the formation of a centralized system, this does not necessarily coincide with only one specific type of sociopolitical system, and it is not itself sufficient to be able to identify the presence of the state.

I think that one feature of the state, even in its incipient forms, is its capacity to impose authority and obtain consensus by means of intrinsic self-legitimization and a direct relationship with the people, not only channeled via ideology and religion. This is not to say that ideology did not play an extremely important role in early forms of pristine states; indeed, it was in those contexts that a system of ideas and concepts was created to support and underpin the legitimacy of the nascent authority, also using codified images and creating what has been defined as the "ideology of power." Even though many of these concepts were often linked to a religious tradition and the supernatural world, the "king" or leader must have exercised power, albeit "delegated by the divinity," in secular forms and places, autonomously creating his own system of rules and being represented by other delegated institutional figures vested with tasks and prerogatives. The emergence of a bureaucracy as a class of officials with delegated powers is another feature of the state.

The state also resolved conflicts, which may have increased exponentially between different competing groups and needs of a composite and stratified society, through the exercise of a recognized power and the control over an ideology that made the central institutions and the ruling class perceived not as another party in the conflict but as a regulator and benefit provider. The perception of leaders as benefit providers also was widespread in pre-state societies, but the power of early states was based on a combination of the capacity to obtain ideological consensus and the ability to impose authority and unequal social relations. The emerging state institutions ultimately were the main agents that supported the success of one of the conflicting components over the others.

Interesting hints in this respect come from the dual-processual theory elaborated by Blanton et al. (1996) for Mesoamerica. If we look at their two types of power strategy—corporate and exclusionary—as two different forms of political relations that also may have been two poles in a process of change, these concepts could potentially illustrate some aspects of the transformation of Southern Mesopotamian society from one based on large families, partly sharing power and certainly competing, to an increasingly vertical and exclusionary "political system built around the monopoly control of sources of power by a supreme authority" (Blanton et al. 1996, p. 2; see also Bernbeck 2008, pp. 540–542).

Distinctive Features of the State Formation Process in Southern Mesopotamia

Lower Mesopotamia is largely a homogeneous region in terms of its cultural and political developments, while being ecologically differentiated into micro-zones that offer different potential and resources. It is precisely the ecological differences in a restricted area, coupled with other high risk factors, such as aridity, proneness to soil salinity, and the need for irrigation and water control in agricultural practices, that probably primarily account for the early centralization of the staple economy and the emergence of systematic redistribution practices from the time those lands were first occupied (Adams 1966, 1981). The whole region also underwent early, intense urbanization and saw the emergence of religious-ceremonial institutions operating in architecturally monumental buildings already in the earliest occupation phases. There are almost no new archaeological data on Southern Mesopotamia, but the data obtained in the past on major fourth and fifth millennium sites, such as Uruk-Warka, Tello, Nippur, Abu Salabikh, Tell Uqair, Eridu, Ur, and Tell Oueili, together with the in-depth territorial surveys conducted by Adams and Wright (Adams 1981; Wright 1969, 1981), permit us to reliably speculate on the organizational, social, and economic characteristics of these societies. Substantial information in this respect also has come from studies of the pictographic tablets from the final Uruk levels at Warka (Nissen et al. 1993).

Available archaeological data on Southern Mesopotamia suggest that the alluvial plain in the sixth and fifth millennia BC was first occupied by communities whose social structure was based on extended families, judging from the dimensions and layout of the typical dwellings of the so-called Ubaid culture found at Tell Oueili

Fig. 2 Mesopotamian buildings of the Ubaid and Uruk periods (fifth–fourth millennia BC). **a**: The ▶
reconstruction of a large tripartite house from Tell Oueili, Ubaid phase 0 (from Huot 1991); **b**: Eridu,
plan of the level VII 'temple'; **c**: Part of the Tell Abada village (from Jasim 1989, fig. 2). The larger
tripartite houses are highlighted in gray; **d**: 3D perspective view of the Eanna monumental complex at
Uruk-Warka (elaborated by C. Alvaro)

(Huot 1989, 1991), as well as at Tell Abada and Tell Maddhur, in the Hamrin
Valley. While these two latter sites lay outside the Mesopotamian alluvial plain,
they were fully part of the Ubaid culture, which also extended as far as this region in
the fifth millennium (Jasim 1989; Margueron 1987). Very large "tripartite" houses
with a common central area and two lateral wings of more or less symmetrical
rooms built according to highly standardized patterns suggest that they were
occupied by extended and composite households who used different parts of the
dwelling according to codified rules (Fig. 2a, c). In the only Ubaid village that has
been fully excavated, Tell Abada (Jasim 1989), two adjacent dwellings (houses A
and B) were considerably larger than the others. One of the houses had distinctive
features (Fig. 2c)—buttresses on the walls, an adjacent walled area (perhaps to
receive people), and a concentration of child burials underneath the floors, which
might suggest that this house belonged to a preeminent family vested with the
symbolic power of representing the community as a whole. All of this suggests that
the Ubaid communities' kinship system was organized along hierarchical lines of
descent that must have entrenched inequalities of rank, not necessarily associated
with economic privileges at first, but bringing about a sort of horizontal inequality
or "vertical egalitarian system" (Frangipane 2007a, pp. 164–170, 2016,
pp. 471–474). A social organization based on large families also may be inferred
from the later developments of Mesopotamian society, which, according to Early
Dynastic texts, appear to have been made up of hierarchically organized household
corporations.

High-ranking figures also may have been vested with managing social, economic,
religious, and political transactions. Among the special features of the main house at
Tell Abada, for example, there was an assemblage of clay tokens that appear to have
been very ancient accounting tools (Schmandt Besserat 1992). There is no evidence
of clay sealings and administration in Southern Mesopotamia in the early Ubaid
phase, to which the village of Tell Abada belonged, but the concentration of tokens
in the large house may mean that preeminent individuals (the chief and his family?)
who may have lived there had been endowed with certain prerogatives that included
the authority to coordinate or effect transactions of some kind.

We have no evidence in this respect from the southern alluvial sites, which were
excavated a long time ago and over very small areas from these earliest periods. But
it was there that "temples" or ceremonial buildings had been erected at Eridu. The
temples had a tripartite layout similar to that of the houses, but with distinctive
features: a monumental character, a raised basement, a complex decoration with
buttresses and recesses in the walls, and a different internal distribution of spaces.
They were dominated by a large central room that likely was used for public
gatherings and that also contained two platforms, probably "podia" for ceremonies
and public banquets (Safar et al. 1981) (Fig. 2b). Whether or not these buildings
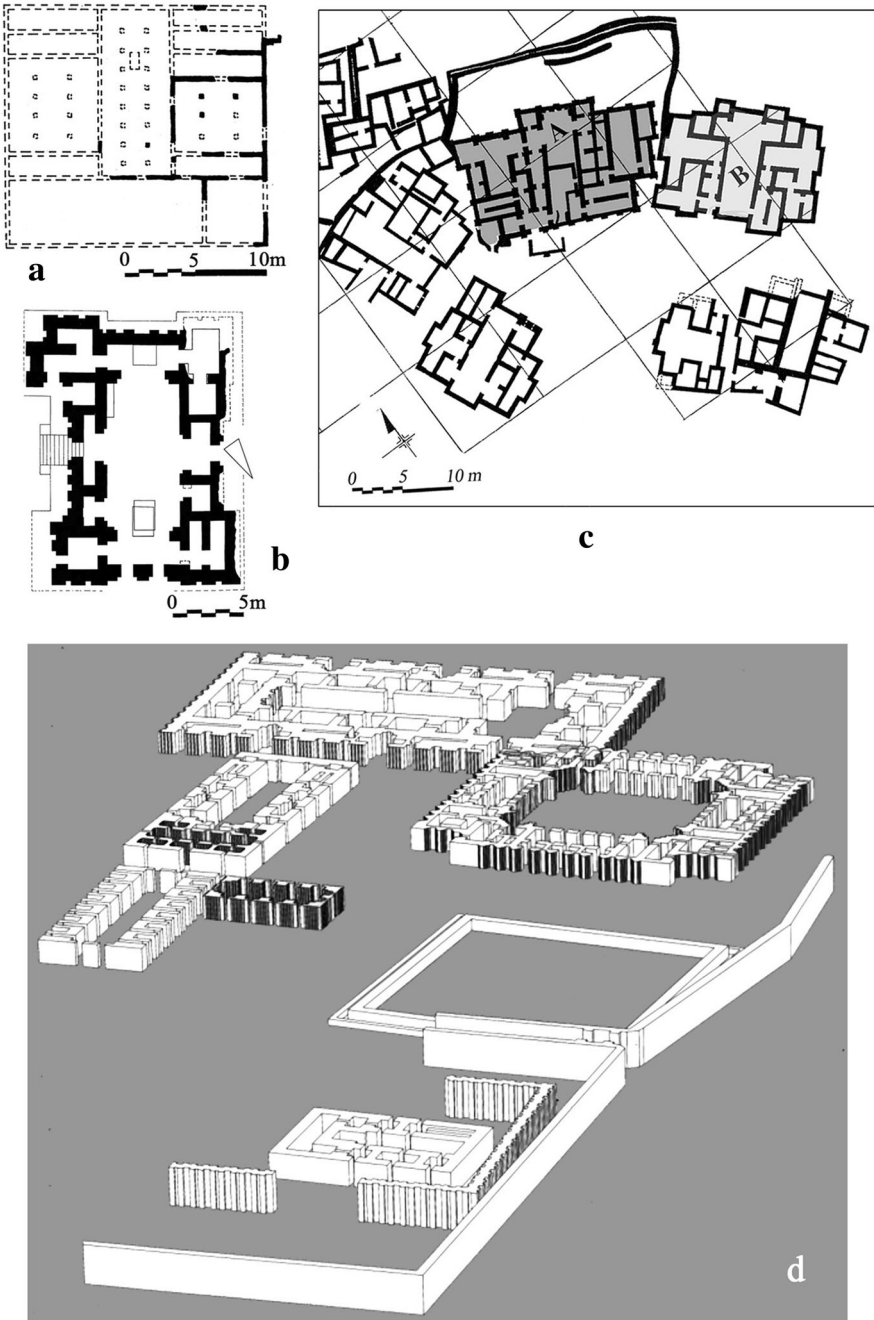
were used for cultic purposes in the strict sense of the term, as Forest (1987) maintained, they were certainly ceremonial buildings designed for public gatherings and were probably used for ceremonial food distributions. Evidence of this includes,

among other things, the well-known finding of plentiful fish bones in the side room of one of the late Ubaid phase buildings at Eridu (Adams 1966; Frangipane 1996). It is quite likely that these buildings were the places where high-ranking personages, perhaps community leaders, conducted ritual and other public ceremonies.

The iconography of the most recent Late Uruk seals (end of the fourth millennium) reveals the close relationship between the priest/king, the temple, and the public and ceremonial management of foodstuffs (Fig. 3a–c); these are the three key elements of the centralized power system that typified fourth millennium Mesopotamian society. Their roots probably lie in the original social and economic structure of those communities in the previous Ubaid period. Late Uruk glyptics ideologically emphasized the offerings to the temple, namely, the incoming goods used to fuel the circuit hinging around food redistribution. This circuit, which was
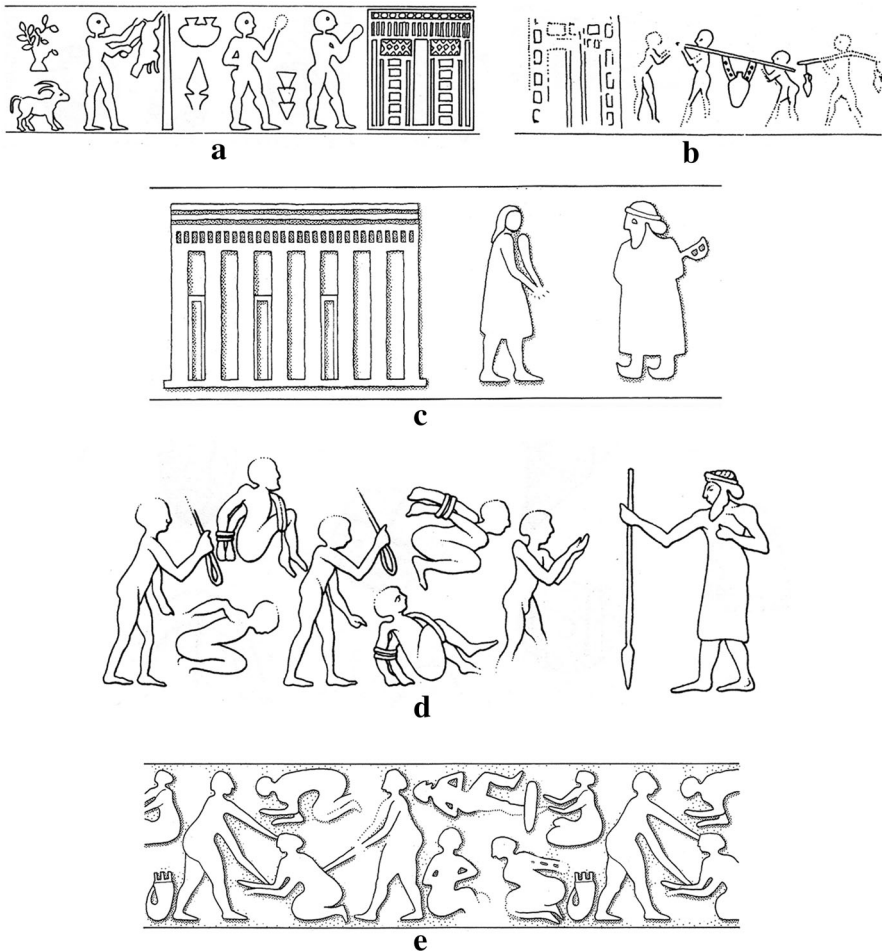

Fig. 3 Images relating to the sphere of power on cylinder seals from Uruk-Warka. **a**: From Brandes 1979, taf. 30; **b**: From Amiet 1961, pl. 13bis, D; **c–e**: From Boehmer 1999, taf. 17, 26, 35)

originally ritualized and perhaps only designed for the redistribution of certain goods in the 5th millennium, must have become an entrepreneurial system under which many items entering the system were used to support an increasingly large number of individuals, investing in labor and consequently in the production of new goods.

It is no coincidence that this system, which spread throughout the whole of the so-called Greater Mesopotamia, originated in the southern alluvial plain where the environment was precarious, with serious aridity and different types of soils in terms of crop yields—some were more seriously affected by swampy marshes and a high water table that, at high temperatures, caused soil salinization. The area also was endowed with vast plains that, with a few technical strategies (irrigation, excess water management), were able to offer huge potential for expanding agricultural production, particularly of cereals. This environment must have favored the birth of social kinship systems that legitimized unequal access to lands and resources varying in quality, while at the same time guaranteeing the circulation of those resources and the coordination of critical subsistence activities managed by individuals vested with legitimate authority to perform them. Ideological and, above all, religious legitimation of the authority and its right/duty to manage "public affairs" and to intervene in substantial aspects of the staple economy must have been a crucial means of ensuring the working of the whole system and its political and social solidity (Aldenderfer 2012; Godelier 1977, ch. IV.1).

Effective social inequality, the privileged status and prestige of the chiefs, and their strong ideological legitimization would have made the redistribution circuit expansive, probably triggering a self-feeding growth and transformation process: increasing centralization of food for redistribution, growing numbers of increasingly poorer people needing to be supported by receiving that food, expanding prestige and power vested in the leaders, the offer of labor and services in exchange for food, and the leaders' need to accumulate means of production with the resultant increasing demand for more labor. Social inequality must thereby have led very soon to developing economic inequality and the concentration of political power (Frangipane 2016).

Even at the end of the fourth millennium, when the leaders had acquired huge power and already controlled an enormous variety and quantity of goods and economic transactions, managing them in public areas with the help of a sophisticated administrative system, the context and the legitimization of that power continued to have predominantly cultic connotations. This is clear in the large city of Uruk-Warka, not only for the areas specifically set apart for cultic purposes, such as the so-called White Temple, where no economic/administrative activity was performed (Nissen 2015), but also in the very large area of Eanna; among the numerous architecturally diverse buildings of Eanna that in all likelihood were used for various economic/administrative and political activities were other large and monumental structures that possess all the typical features of Mesopotamian classical temples (Butterlin 2012; Eichmann 2007).

Another significant feature of these Mesopotamian societies is the fact that social hierarchies are not reflected in burials and funerary rituals. The Ubaid period cemeteries at Ur and Eridu show no signs of any differentiation in terms of funerary

gifts or burial customs and seem to reveal a process of ideological obliteration of the differences, which were on the other hand manifested in houses and temples (Pollock and Wright 1987, pp. 324–328). Very few burials of the Uruk period have been found, and the few known examples also show very little differentiation. One might infer, as Stein (1994, p. 43) has suggested, that leaders in the Ubaid period wanted "to emphasize their group membership, while downplaying intra-group differentiation," by removing any display of status and economic differences, thereby reinforcing the perception that they were part of the community, performing tasks to the people's advantage and distributing benefits. That also might explain the scant importance ascribed to funerary ideology in the Uruk period, as it was not intended to display the true social order or emphasize the privileged position of the elites. This kind of ideology has been correlated with strategies chiefly based on staple finance, in which the upholding of kinship ties may have been "the most effective way to mobilize labor and surplus staples from commoners" (Stein 1994, p. 43; see also Earle 1991).

In reality, this type of relationship between the elites and commoners in a context like Mesopotamia gradually increased the economic power and privileges of the elites and widened the inequality gap. The leaders' capacity to centralize labor, remunerating it with staples, appears also to have led to an increasing ability to centralize the means of producing those staples (land and livestock) and to control the overall production system, perhaps including some craft production, as may be inferred from the huge concentration of mass-produced bowls in public areas as well as from information gleaned from the Uruk IV-III administrative and lexical texts. This must have entailed an increasingly more intense involvement of the territory surrounding the seats of the political, religious, and administrative institutions, while at the same time attracting an increasing inflow of people toward those seats, where activities and opportunities also were concentrated.

Urbanization therefore played a key role and was one of the distinctive features of Lower Mesopotamian society. There already may have been some large and highly populated centers in the alluvium as early as the fifth millennium BC (Adams 1981), even though there are no excavations that provide accurate information on the dimensions of the sites apart from the observation of scattered surface materials. But urbanization was certainly fully accomplished by the fourth millennium, with sites covering more than 40–50 ha and the main center of Uruk-Warka occupying an area of between 70 and 100 ha in Early Uruk (first half of the fourth millennium) and reaching an unparalleled 200 ha or more in Late Uruk (second half of the fourth millennium) (Adams 1981; Algaze 2008; Nissen 2015; Pollock 2001).

Such large sites would have needed an organization comprising specialized and interdependent sectors and a very powerful political authority that was able to integrate all of the parts and to keep them firmly together. I also think that centers of such proportions could have existed and developed only in environments with an agricultural economy capable of producing sufficient food to feed so many people.

The use of administrative tools was the essential key to ensuring economic control over the circulation of goods and political control over the people who were party to those transactions. In the fourth millennium, administrative technologies had developed enormously in terms of quantity and quality, with the introduction,

besides *cretulae* (clay sealings) for sealing containers and doors, of other administrative instruments that met many varied needs related to the substantial increase in the number of operations and stages in the accounting and recording processes: hanging ovoid *cretulae*, spherical *bullae* that often contained tokens, "complex" tokens that increased the number of signs and hence the information to be conveyed (Fiandra and Frangipane 2007a; Schmandt Besserat 1992). Increased numbers of administrative tools and the need to extend control to a larger number of players, and perhaps to the rural environment surrounding the cities, certainly entailed the rise of a bureaucracy and numerous officials—as evidenced by the large numbers of different seals—to whom the ruling class could delegate authority. Administration and bureaucracy provided the authorities with the capacity to exercise intrusive political and economic control.

By the mid-fourth millennium at the latest, in the Middle and Late Uruk phases, all of the elements that we have defined as characteristic of a pristine state system were already in place in southern Mesopotamia.

Institutionalized and centralized economic power interfered in the general production and circulation systems by accumulating staples, and possibly the means of production, by controlling the labor force, and by allocating goods through routine redistribution.

Ideological control of the social order is revealed by imagery in glyptics and art works, including the famous Uruk alabaster vessel (Schmandt Besserat 2007, pp. 41–46) and the iconography of the King-Priest in seals, as well as by the impressive monumentality of temples and ceremonial buildings that were the main seats of power. Even the depiction of prisoners in thrall to the King-Priest in the Late Uruk glyptics (Amiet 1961; Brandes 1979) (Fig. 3c, d) may not necessarily depict prisoners of war; they also could be a more general portrayal of individuals in an attitude of submission to the chief to ideologically express or reinforce his power and authority over the population, including his capacity to use violence (Bernbeck 2009, pp. 51–52; Nissen 2015, p. 120).

Political power was expressed by (1) an authority legitimized to impose obedience, by using ideological and/or physical force, as suggested by the imagery in glyptics and by the impressiveness and huge size of the places in which the leaders performed their public functions; (2) the need and ability to delegate this power to other officials—the bureaucrats—to minister "state business" on behalf of the rulers, making it possible for them to gradually expand their control in terms of organizational effectiveness and the numbers of people and territories involved. This is shown from the concentration of administrative materials in public areas and in various minor sites in the territory (Wright et al. 1980), the extraordinary large number of different seals (increased number of officials and individuals with administrative responsibilities), and the variety of sealing practices and recording tools (Amiet 1961; Boehmer 1999; Brandes 1979).

Social power appears to have been underpinned by a hierarchically organized social structure from the beginning, in which the legitimacy of the leaders must have come from the very fact that they were also high-rank individuals, as evidenced by the probable existence of high-status persons as early as the beginning of the Ubaid period (late sixth and early fifth millennia BC). Here again, social hierarchy

complexity must have expanded still further in the fourth millennium with the emergence of the new class of bureaucrats who were very closely linked (ideologically and perhaps by kin ties) and dependent on those in whose name they operated.

Three major aspects linked to this new structure of political, social, and economic power characterized the new type of society in southern Mesopotamia: a high level of *urbanization*, which, judging from the evidence found in various surveys, seems to have begun very early (Adams 1981); the early foundation of a *hierarchical social structure*; and the extremely important part played by *ideological/religious mediation*, which still seems to have featured the exercise of power in Lower Mesopotamia at the end of the fourth millennium and beyond.

Diversified Pathways to Centralization in Northern Mesopotamia

While Northern Mesopotamia generally has better conditions for agriculture, having sufficient rainfall for dry farming, its territory is extremely varied and differs from Southern Mesopotamia in terms of the extension of the arable land, which is really large only in the Khabour region. Much recent research conducted in the northern regions of Greater Mesopotamia has produced new and important information of relevance to the earliest states, particularly investigations in the Khabour basin and eastern Jezira, at sites such as Tell Brak and Hamoukar (Gibson et al. 2002; McMahon and Oates 2007; Oates and Oates 1993, 1997; Oates 2002).

The territory of Northern Mesopotamia was by no means homogeneous, not only in terms of environmental features, but also in terms of settlement patterns, organizational features, and cultural developments (Wilkinson et al. 2014). In very general terms we can distinguish between the plains and hilly steppes of Upper Mesopotamia proper, coinciding roughly with the Syro-Iraqi Jezirah and characterized by a certain degree of cultural homogeneity in the Late Chalcolithic; the Middle Euphrates Valley, which today runs partly through Syria and partly through Turkey as far as the Taurus range, in which the communities, despite their close relations with the Jezirah sites, had a different territorial organization and also exhibited clearly visible cultural differences, depending on the periods; and the Middle Tigris Valley and the areas adjacent to the Zagros foothills, which have been less thoroughly investigated than the other two zones in recent years and therefore offer few truly reliable data (Fig. 1).

All of these areas were linked and homogenized by the spreading of the so-called Halaf culture throughout the sixth millennium BC, which was perhaps conveyed by the multiplication of small and demographically growing communities (Nieuwenhuyse et al. 2013). This phenomenon seems to have created a common, shared cultural substrate, despite regional differences that continued to live on. In the fifth millennium, the pressure from Ubaid communities to interact with these groups, perhaps also accompanied by movements of people, found a relatively homogeneous area and produced a radical change in the social, economic, and political structure of the northern communities (Frangipane 2007a, 2015). A new type of hierarchical society came into being, albeit with subregional variations, that was

Table 1 Arslantepe and Mesopotamian chronology

Greater Mesopotamia		Arslantepe periods
LC 1–2	4400–4000 BC	VIII
LC 3	3900–3600 BC	VII
LC 4	3600–3400 BC	VII
LC 5	3400–3100 BC	VIA
EB I	3100–3000 BC	VIB 1
EB I	3000–2800 BC	VIB 2

very different from the earlier Halaf society. New elites started centralizing and redistributing staples, apparently even in their own houses, which in some cases were large, tripartite buildings according to Southern Mesopotamian models. Emblematic examples are the settlements of level XII at Tepe Gawra, east of the Tigris, and the village of Değirmentepe on the Upper Euphrates (Esin 1994; Rothman 2002; Tobler 1950), where numerous clay sealings and seals have been found in the main houses. Administered goods and rituals in temple-like buildings also closely resembled those found in the south. The various different forms of hybridization with the local culture and adaptation to different ecological environments led, once again, to regional variations (Carter and Philip 2010), which became more marked in the early phases of Late Chalcolithic (LC 1–2, 4400–3900 BC) (Table 1). In the latter periods, clearly distinct cultural aspects and quotidian behaviors can be recognized in the Euphrates Valley and to the west, in the Balikh Valley, in central-eastern Jezirah, and along the Tigris (Marro 2012).

In the following Late Chalcolithic 3 (3900–3600 BC), a new unifying process created a more homogeneous cultural substrate throughout all of Jezirah, between the Tigris and the Euphrates, partially leaving out the regions west of the Euphrates and north of the Taurus Mountains, which retained their own characteristics. This unifying process in the Northern Mesopotamia plains accompanied the development of the first truly urban centers in the Khabour region and the consolidation and expansion there of a centralized, redistributive system based on staple resources and labor. This system had first been brought into existence in the north in the fifth millennium BC and characterized the whole Mesopotamian world in the fourth millennium. It is possible that it was precisely the political pressure of the expanding urban centers in the Khabour that drove this process of cultural unification of the whole Jezirah in LC3.

Social and Economic Structures

The differences in cultural aspects and daily habits between populations in the Euphrates Valley and those in Jezira proper must have depended on radical structural differences between them. This was perhaps partly due to their different social and household structure, which still may have retained their original features and family habits that were based on nuclear families in the Euphrates region (except for the colonial sites), as evidenced by both the dimension and shape of the houses and cooking and eating habits (Balossi Restelli 2010). Conversely, the social

structure of the Jezira societies seems to have changed more radically, perhaps due to their closer interaction with the Ubaid world.

The differences between communities in the Middle and the Upper Euphrates Valley also must have been linked to their different ecological and environmental contexts, which led to a different organization of the subsistence economy and territorial arrangements. The lack of wide-ranging plains and the presence of mountains probably prevented a sufficient expansion of agriculture to support the formation of large urban centers with a high concentration of people, while the environmental diversity appears to have encouraged the economic integration of such various components as sedentary farming communities and mobile pastoralist groups. This integrated and dichotomous system with good agriculture but limited expansion potential, together with a simpler social kinship structure that was perhaps internally less competitive than Mesopotamia's (nuclear families cooperating rather than large families often competing with one another), must have reduced the potential for developing stable and solid stratified, diversified, and closely integrated societies, as urban societies were. In these areas, mostly "tribally structured" societies seem to have prevailed again in the third millennium after the so-called collapse of the Uruk system (Cooper 2006, pp. 54–63). This was the basic traditional structure of the Euphrates communities, which had never become full-fledged state and urban societies (see also the debate in Porter 2012).

Urbanization

While centralized political structures are documented in several areas in the north, an actual urbanization phenomenon significantly occurred only in the Khabour region and in central-eastern Jezira. The largest fourth millennium site in the Middle Euphrates valley was Habuba Kabira, which was almost certainly a colonial settlement founded by southern Uruk-related groups (Strommenger 1980; Strommenger et al. 2014). Despite having an urban layout with streets and quarters, a separate temple area, and a very large amount of administrative materials, Habuba did not exceed an area of 18–19 ha. The other known and investigated fourth millennium sites, whether colonial or otherwise, were always much smaller, and the territory as a whole in no way appears to have been urbanized before the mid-third millennium BC (Algaze et al. 1994).

Conversely, large sites developed in the Khabour region, above all Tell Brak, which appears to have reached more than 40 ha as early as LC2 (4200–3900 BC), when monumental buildings in the northern excavation area (TW) have been documented; it must have exceeded 130 ha by LC3–4 (3800–3400 BC), when we have evidence of the first construction of the large Eye Temple in the site's southern zone (Emberling and McDonald 2003; Matthews 2003; McMahon and Oates 2007; Oates and Oates 1993, 1997; Oates 2002; Oates et al. 2007; Ur 2014b). The Khabour plain was irrigated naturally by numerous watercourses and had sufficient rainfall for successful rainfed agriculture. But the archaeobotanical data at Tell Brak suggest that in the urbanization phases some forms of irrigation, or simply of water management, also must have been practiced and that the farmed areas must have expanded to include most arid lands, as suggested by the substantial increase in

barley, which is more adaptable to less favorable and more arid conditions (Charles et al. 2010). This kind of response to the need for greater volumes of agricultural products, most likely linked to the urban dimension of centers such as Tell Brak, was made possible by the large extension of the central Jezirah plains and hilly lands, which could have been farmed even in arid zones with some technical devices. There were certainly no such vast areas of potentially arable land available in the Middle/Upper Euphrates valleys.

Relations must have been intense with the pastoralists moving around the mountains surrounding the Mesopotamian plains, and also in Jezirah, as Wilkinson et al. (2014, p. 45) have emphasized when speaking about the "pastoral and wealth-based economy" as one of the sectors of the economic strategies of the early states in the Fertile Crescent (see also Porter 2012). But the presence of powerful centralized structures and urban systems must have created a centrally regulated and governed economic integration, which probably also entailed the imposition of political control over the pastoralist groups. In nonurbanized and not fully state-governed areas, conversely, the presumable greater autonomy enjoyed by the pastoralist and rural groups may well have given rise to more dialectical and dynamic interactions that at the same time created more changeable relations potentially leading to instability.

Although the urbanized areas of Jezirah were similar to those in Southern Mesopotamia, and even though we have to be cautious because of the different degrees of depth and details of the information on the southern alluvium compared with the thoroughly investigated territories in Upper Mesopotamia, the urban growth dynamics in these northern areas seem to have followed different pathways than those in the south. According to the detailed surveys of Tell Brak and its environs and the Tell Hamoukar area (Al Quntar et al. 2011; Ur 2010, 2014b; Ur et al. 2011; Wilkinson 2000; Wilkinson et al. 2014), the population of both areas (though differing in size) grew and gathered progressively around the main site from the fifth and throughout the fourth millennia BC. This has been studied and documented in great detail at Tell Brak, where small satellite sites were scattered around the main mound over a radius of at least 1 km. These sites were quite distant from each other in LC2, and little by little they drew ever more closely together around the main center, whose dimensions at the same time expanded exponentially in LC 3 and 4, creating a sort of integrated settlement system with the assumed decentralization of certain activities and functions in some of these minor satellite sites (McMahon and Stone 2013). The growth of nucleated urban centers surrounded by arable land and without any settlements in the immediate vicinity—a phenomenon already visible around Uruk from the outset, in the Late Chalcolithic (Adams 1981; Adams and Nissen 1972)—is conversely attested in the north in the Early Bronze Age (Wilkinson et al. 2014, p. 48).

In Upper Mesopotamia, urban nuclearization was therefore a gradual and rather lengthy process that included a progressive increase in population density and aggregation of sites around the emerging political–administrative and possibly religious centers. This led to the establishment of wide, densely occupied areas surrounding the main nuclear centers, where specialization and the integration of activities and functions not only took place initially through their direct concentration in the main site, leading to its expansion, but probably also through

the establishment of a network of relationships between the small satellite sites and the larger center, where the central political functions were concentrated, as indicated by monumental public buildings and substantial ceremonial, administrative, and redistribution areas (Emberling and McDonald 2003; McMahon and Oates 2007; Reichel 2002). At Tell Brak, the main center also expanded gradually until it took on vast proportions around the mid-fourth millennium (over 100 ha), almost to the point of joining the small surrounding sites (Ur 2014b, pp. 52–56, figs. 3.2–3.3). This increased density came about at the expense of most of the cropped lands around the sites and probably spelled the end of the self-sufficiency of these small settlements, creating what was a full-fledged urban system of interacting parts, albeit in what were still relatively low-density peripheries. Developments of this kind must have been made possible only by a considerable rise in agricultural surpluses, perhaps achieved by extending cultivation to less favorable and more remote lands (Charles et al. 2010).

Political and Economic Centralization

Even though urbanization in the north took place only in the Khabour area and its environs, where there were favorable conditions, the centralized system with a powerful administrative organization and ideological/religious backing became established throughout the northern regions, though to different levels of development. One only has to think of the huge development of the administrative and religious public area on such a small site as Tepe Gawra (levels IX-VIII) already at the beginning of the fourth millennium (Butterlin 2009; Rothman 2002). Administrative operations were greatly intensified and became increasingly more complex in the course of the fourth millennium, as attested by the sophisticated administrative materials found at Tell Brak and Hamoukar (Pittman 2003; Reichel 2002), as well as in the Middle Euphrates sites, both in the colonies (Habuba Kabira and Jebel Aruda) (Strommenger et al. 2014; Van Driel and Van Driel-Murray 1983) and in small local sites (Hacinebi B1) (Stein et al. 1996). These activities were mainly concentrated in public and elite areas, which also exhibit an increasing monumentality (see, for example, the monumental buildings in the TW 20-18 levels and the Eye Temple at Tell Brak, as well as the public buildings at Tepe Gawra X-VIII), and were associated with the massive presence of mass-produced bowls. All of these elements reveal the growth of central institutions that were able to largely control production and labor as early as the first half of the fourth millennium, between LC2 and LC3, in parallel with what was happening in Lower Mesopotamia. Here again, the central political strategies seem to have been concentrated principally around the staple economy.

North and South: A Comparison

Social Structures

There must have been important differences between the basic social structures of the northern and the southern communities, although with the data available we can

only advance cautious hypotheses. One important initial consideration is that the structure of the Halaf societies, from which the Late Chalcolithic communities in the north originated, was essentially egalitarian, and this must have established the original difference between these and the Southern Mesopotamian communities of the Samarra-Ubaid cultures, which seem to have already displayed forms of internal social differentiation and the emergence of high-status persons ("horizontal" vs. "vertical egalitarian" societies) (Frangipane 2007a). Looking at the Late Chalcolithic period, we can detect signs of a lower degree of stratification in the northern communities than in the Lower Mesopotamian societies, judging from the size of the houses (and presumably of the households) and their lesser degree of internal differentiation inside the settlements, where these have been sufficiently excavated. The dimensions of the tripartite houses at Tell Brak (TW level 16) and Hamoukar in Late Chalcolithic 3–5, as well as the Tepe Gawra levels XI-X houses in LC 1–2, measured between 30 and 60 m^2 (Rothman 2002; Tobler 1950). Although we have no direct comparisons with southern houses in the Late Chalcolithic, based on the colonial settlements of Habuba Kabira and Jebel Aruda, the main tripartite core of those large houses alone occupied between 120 and 170 m^2 (Strommenger 1980; Van Driel and Van Driel-Murray 1983), which was almost twice the size of houses in the local northern sites. An interesting comparison can be drawn with the earliest southern houses at Tell Oueili, in the Ubaid phases, which reflect the households of the southern communities in their formation stages and which appear to have been decidedly larger, reaching almost 300 m^2 (Fig. 2a).

Finally, for the internal organization of settlements, we have data from the colonial site of Jebel Aruda, where one sector in the settlement, which was the main seat of administrative activities, was also the area with the largest and most standardized houses; unfortunately, there is almost no information from other Late Chalcolithic sites in Northern Mesopotamia, due to limited extensive excavations.

Ideology

This possible different kind of social composition was accompanied by another feature that, in my opinion, distinguished the urban societies in the Khabour from those of the Southern Mesopotamian alluvial plain: the different ideology of power, as it emerged in the ways in which it was visually represented. At Uruk, the personage of the ruler, the so-called King-Priest, was regularly represented in various types of art with clear identifying features that distinguish him from other human figures: the dress, the beard, and a band around the head. This is how the ruler was depicted in statuary and in seal iconography, where he is shown in scenes on cylinder seals performing the main functions connected with his role, focusing on ritual or ritualized acts (receiving offerings near the temple) and the ostentatious exercise of authority and force (Fig. 3c, d) (Boehmer 1999; Brandes 1979). The prevalent use of cylinder seals in Southern Mesopotamian must have been largely due to the need for an appropriate support to recount the essential features of the ideology of power in complex settings. The ruler's function also was emphasized in more complex images, such as those depicted in bas-relief on the famous Uruk alabaster vase, in which the sovereign—which is largely missing and has been

hypothetically reconstructed—is related in ritual act with the figure of the divinity, probably Inanna (Schmandt Besserat 2007, pp. 42–46). The rest of the scene, in the lower levels, shows the social and universal hierarchical order according to what must have been the dominant ideology: processions of persons bearing offerings and, underneath, rows of animals (caprines) and plants (cereals and palms?) that together with water (canals?) constituted the staple products of the Mesopotamian population and must have been the main area of interest in the economic strategies of the ruling class.

Conversely, in the Upper Mesopotamian glyptic, which was characterized by specific stylistic features and the prevalence of stamp seals that formed part of an ancient tradition dating back to the Neolithic, the seals mainly depicted animals. That indicates, in my opinion, a different ideological function of the imagery on seals, which was not intended mainly to represent and recount the life of the emerging central institutions and the key personages (ruler, bureaucrats, offerings, prisoners). The most significant scene that can be linked to the symbolic image of power is a lion hunt, which, in addition to being a common motif in the southern glyptics, was found repeatedly in the Tell Brak area (Tell Majnuna), showing the human figure bearing a spear fighting the animal (McMahon 2009) (Fig. 4b). This figure does not have any particular iconographic attributes distinguishing it from any other human representations, which are generally not frequently found. On other seals, the lion is depicted captured in a net. The dominant element therefore seems to have been not so much the ruler with all his attributes, prerogatives, and functions as in the south (Fig. 4a), but rather the representation of a more generic figure—perhaps associated with the image of leader—expressing strength and power in the act of dominating an animal, which was obviously itself the symbol of the power and might of nature. The lion is frequently represented in Mesopotamian glyptics, both alone and in association with other animals, and lion hunting must have had an important symbolic meaning in these contexts. This also may have had its roots in more ancient cultural traditions in the north, as far back as the Halaf period, when a hunting scene with a lion (or some large animal) also was depicted
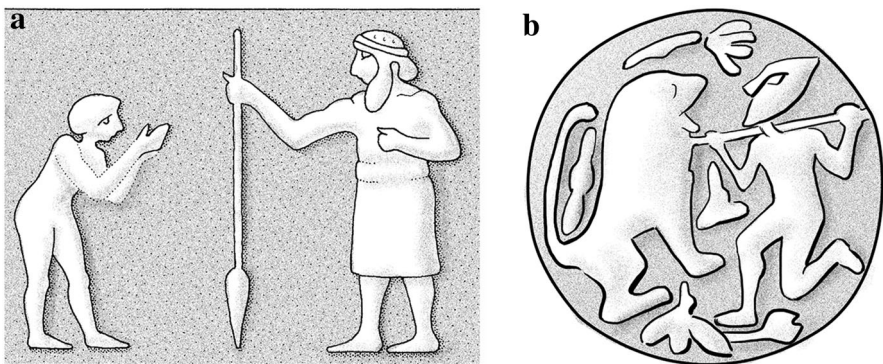

Fig. 4 Different ways of representing power in Southern and Northern Mesopotamia. a: The image of King-Priest at Uruk-Warka (from Boehmer 1999, taf. 17); b: A lion hunting scene from Tell Brak (from McMahon 2009, fig. 1, drawn from photo by A. Siracusano)

on the painted pottery from Arpachiyah, in Eastern Jezira (Hijara 1980, fig. 10; McMahon 2009).

Urbanization

We might reasonably say that the processes leading to the rise of state and urban political entities in Northern and Southern Mesopotamia must have followed different trajectories, mainly because of the different roles played by the urban phenomenon. In the north, early state institutions were formed even in the absence of urban sites, and urbanization seems to have been a gradual result of the formation of centralized institutions only in those areas where agricultural productivity made the growth of urban centers possible. Conversely, in the south, urbanization and state formation seem to have been closely linked from the beginning as two aspects of the same development, aimed at rationalizing the production and circulation of resources in a complicated but potentially highly productive agricultural environment, and in a potentially stratified and internally competitive society.

A significant difference between Northern and Southern Mesopotamian urbanization, besides the uneven spread of the urban phenomenon in the north, also must be related to the dynamics of the formation and development of cities there, which, where the phenomenon did take place, seem to have differed from the process of urban growth in the south. The gradual aggregation of small settlements or population groups in the political centers of Jezirah may indicate a different overall configuration and social composition of cities in the north and the south. An urban society like Brak may have been founded as the result of an increasing amalgamation of different groups and population components under a new and powerful political and economic authority. This process differs from what we presume must have been the case in the south, where the growth and concentration of homogeneous communities into large settlements was based from the outset on genealogical groups with strong kinship ties that were hierarchically organized and underpinned by a solid ideological apparatus. While assumptions of this kind can be supported only by new, extensive, and specifically targeted investigations at sites such as Tell Brak (sadly impossible at the present time), there are some tenuous clues to back up this interpretation. First, the public areas lay on the outskirts of the mound (the Eye Temple to the south and the imposing buildings in TW 18–20 to the north), perhaps designed to serve different sectors and people, also from neighboring areas, in contrast to the very large unitary monumental zones built in the heart of the city at Uruk-Warka. Another clue that political authority was probably less socially rooted in the Upper Mesopotamian centers is the absence of any representation and expression of power in the form of codified images. This suggests that there may have been a different ideological basis and legitimation of the role and the figure of the ruler, whose ascendants and social position must have been far less important than its real political and coordinating functions.

A different example of a large composite city made up of different sectors and groups (even ethnic groups) is the city of Teotihuacan in central Mexico, where the

governor was not viewed and represented as the highest-ranking personage on the genealogical scale, but in terms of his functions in a complex context of interactions between different groups and quarters (Feinman and Nicholas 2011, pp. 137–138; Manzanilla 2012). Despite the undisputed role of temples and ritual practices in the north as well, a society of this kind was fundamentally more secular.

Emergence and Collapse of an Early State Center in the Upper Euphrates Valley: The Precocious Development of a Palatial System at Arslantepe, Malatya

The investigations we have been carrying out for decades at Arslantepe—a stratified mound, standing over 30 m high in the broad Malatya plain, close to the west bank of the Upper Euphrates in eastern Turkey (Fig. 1)—have enabled us to reconstruct a millennia-long history of the site and the region, dating back at least to the fifth millennium BC until the destruction of the Neo-Hittite citadel by the Assyrian king Sargon II in 712 BC. Later Roman and medieval occupations, smaller and of shorter duration, ended the sequence. By thoroughly analyzing the features of the successive building levels, brought to light over wide areas, and a detailed multidisciplinary study of the plentiful in situ materials, we have been able to reconstruct phenomena and processes of remarkable historical and anthropological significance, most of all the formation and subsequent collapse of a very ancient and peculiar form of early state organization in the fourth millennium BC.

The earliest levels that have been extensively explored so far refer to the so-called Arslantepe period VII, covering a long period roughly from 3900 to 3400 BC, corresponding to Late Chalcolithic 3 and 4 in Mesopotamia (Table 1). Throughout this period, characterized by a marked continuity in its development apparently without any substantial changes, the settlement covered the whole mound and even occupied its outskirts that had previously been unoccupied, with a clear spatial distinction between a zone with residences of the elites and a temple/ceremonial area on the top of the ancient mound, and the area of common dwellings built along the slopes and down to the margins of the mound and beyond (Fig. 5a). But the built-up area never reached an "urban" dimension; while it was the largest mound in the region, it was never larger than 5 ha, making Arslantepe a small site in Mesopotamian terms.

A radical and almost abrupt change occurred around 3400–3350 BC (period VIA), when the temples were abandoned and replaced by a huge unitary monumental complex including both public and residential areas, which may be rightly considered to have been the earliest example of a "palace" that has ever been discovered in the Near East. This enormous expansion of the public and elite area was accompanied by a shrinkage in the size of the settlement itself, transforming the site into a kind of political–administrative center in which the "government" and "official" buildings covered most of the southwestern sector of the mound (Fig. 5b) (Frangipane 2012a).
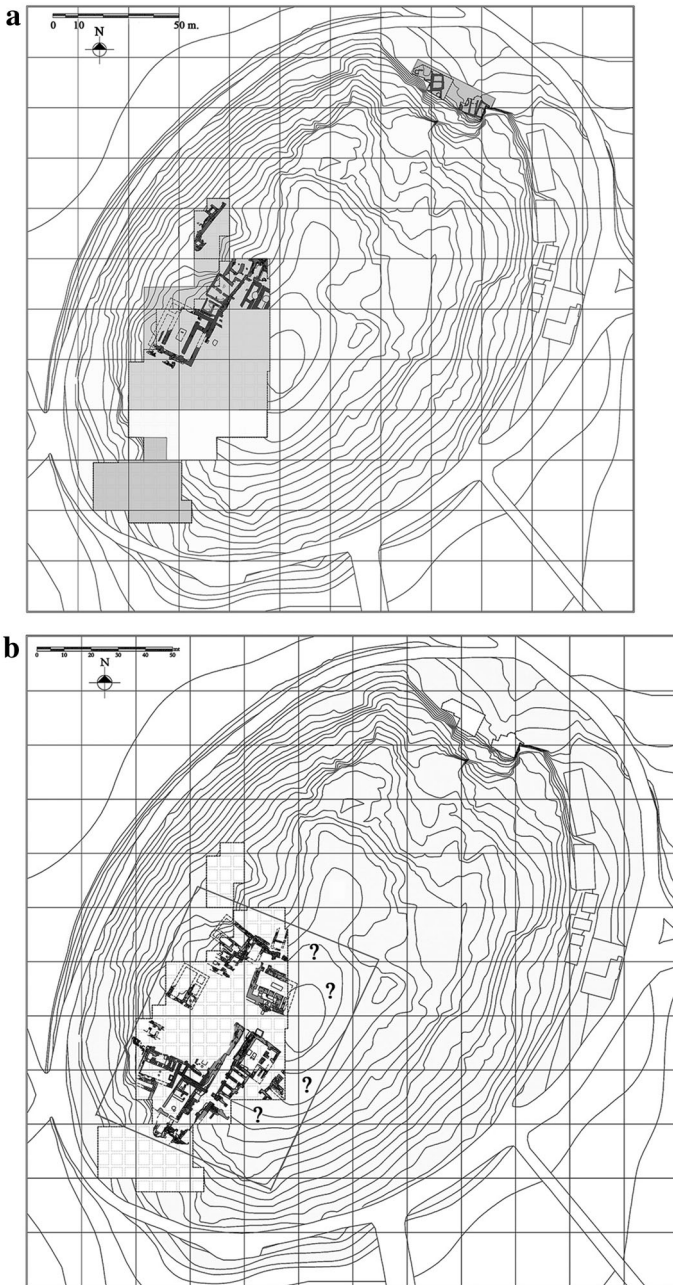
Fig. 5 The mound of Arslantepe-Malatya with the occupied areas in periods VII (a) and VIA (b): **a**: Gray zones indicate the areas where period VII remains have been brought to light; **b**: The area occupied by the palace complex and its presumable extension (question marks refer to hypothesized palace areas in unexcavated zones)

The Origins of the Process in Late Chalcolithic 3–4 (Period VII): Centralization and Redistribution in a Temple Environment

The first half of the fourth millennium at Arslantepe, like in most Mesopotamian sites, showed the development of elites who ran a system of relations with the population revolving around the ceremonial redistribution of food. Excavations have brought to light a sequence of imposing buildings on the highest part of the ancient mound, in which no evidence has been found of public, religious, or economic–administrative activities, suggesting that they were probably residences of high-rank families, perhaps with some functions as representatives of the community (Fig. 6). Red and black wall paintings and mud-brick columns covered with white plaster decorated the main room in one of the residences ("column building") from an early period VII phase (LC3), which was later divided into several rooms, of which one was converted into a food storeroom (room A617). Other rooms in the building had an oven, benches, semisunken *pithoi*, and other items of domestic equipment. The buildings subsequently erected over this residence, though damaged by later constructions, seem to have had the same function.

Adjacent to this zone was a large temple/ceremonial area, consisting of two imposing, adjoining buildings (Temple C and Temple D) standing toward the western edge of the mound (Fig. 7c). The reason why the public area did not stand in the center of the settlement, as in Mesopotamian cities, was probably due to the intention to make the temples visible from the surrounding plain and by the population of the villages, rather than by the people living in the settlement itself.

The two temple buildings were very large and had a codified and tripartite floor plan, recognized with certainty in Temple C, which, though damaged, is quite preserved. The same plan also is assumable for Temple D, which is largely hidden below the subsequent construction of the period VIA Palace on it. Both buildings, together with three large long rooms probably used for craft activities belonged to the most recent phase of period VII. They were certainly contemporary in terms of their use, as is evidenced from finding clay sealings in both of them that bear the impressions of the same seals, thereby indicating that the same individuals with administrative responsibilities had operated in the two buildings. Both structures must therefore have formed an imposing "sacred area."

The tripartite floor plan, with a large central room equipped with a platform podium, and the articulation of some of the walls in multi-recessed niches, are clearly reminiscent of Mesopotamian temple architecture. But the walls of the main hall in the two buildings were decorated with red and black paintings (in Temple C) (Fig. 7a, b) and with painted plastic geometric motifs (in Temple D), related to an Upper/Middle Euphrates cultural environment and a local tradition. The painted plastic decoration found collapsed on the floor in Temple D indeed appears to be somehow unique so far.

These buildings are the only ones at Arslantepe that were built with a tripartite layout, whereas the houses, unlike those in the Mesopotamian world, were never tripartite. According to the evidence gathered in the northeastern peripheral area of
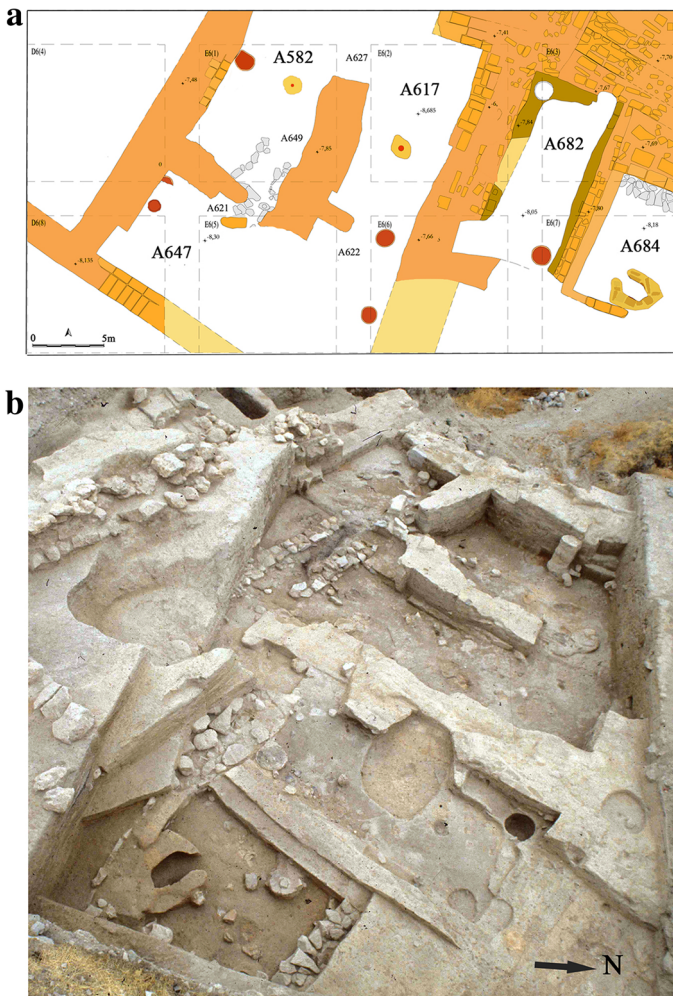
Fig. 6 Arslantepe, period VII. One of the earliest elite residences found so far on the upper mound (LC3, 3800–3600 BC). **a**: Plan of the building in its latest phase (mud-brick columns are indicated in red, fireplaces and oven in yellow); **b**: Photo of the same building (Arslantepe archive)

the site (Palmieri 1978), the Arslantepe houses were small, usually comprising two or three small or medium-sized rooms, following nonstandardized layouts.

The pottery from period VII also was totally different from the southern or "colonial" examples and can be distinguished from the Jezirah repertoire as well, rather it was more similar to a cultural environment typical of southeastern Anatolian regions to the west of the Euphrates, as far as the 'Amuq plain (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960; D'Anna and Guarino 2012). The seal designs also were related to a northern, though wider, cultural tradition (sealings from period VII have very recently been brought to light and are still under study).
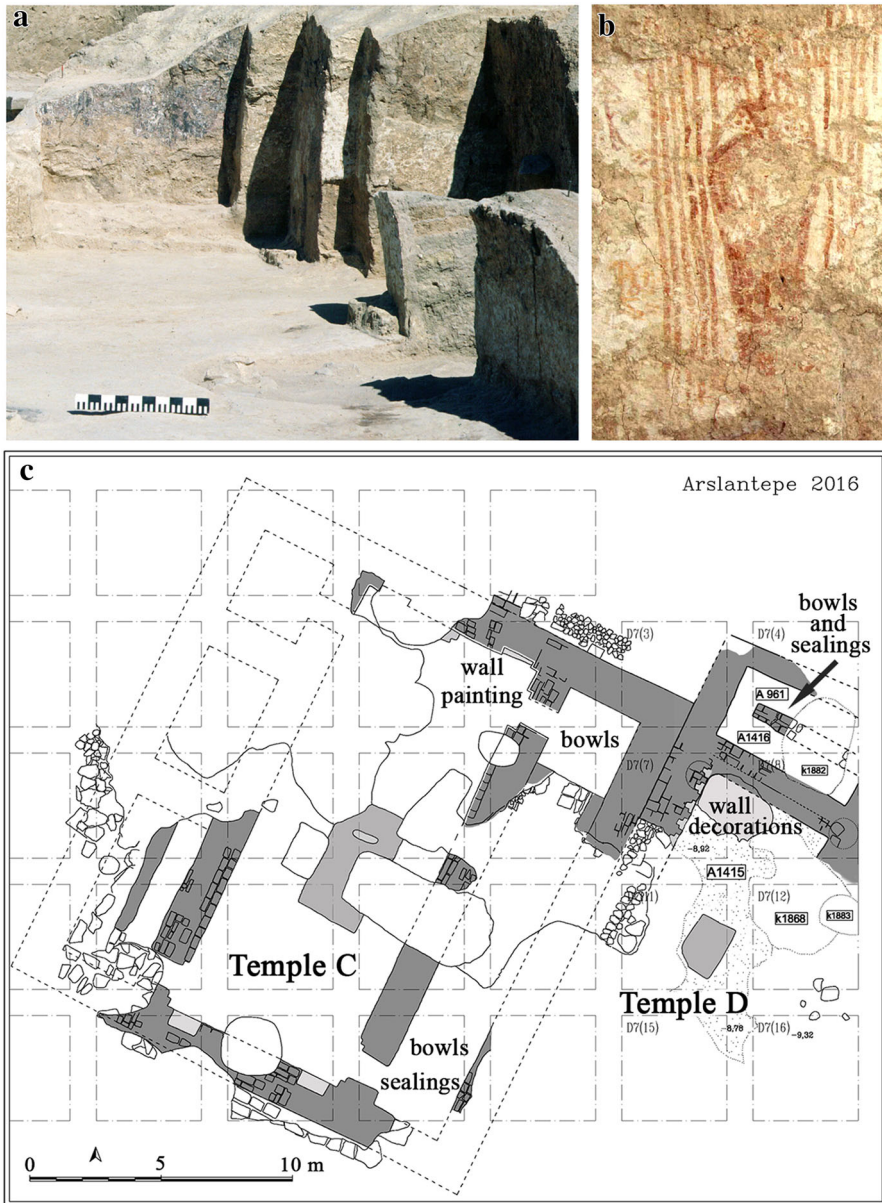
Fig. 7 Arslantepe, period VII. The temple area from the final phase of period VII (LC4). **a**: The niched wall in Temple C; **b**: Wall painting in Temple C; **c**: Plan of Temples C and D

The use of the tripartite plan exclusively for sacred buildings, which were probably the public buildings *par excellence* in that period, may have represented a symbolic reference to a world that was well known to the inhabitants of Arslantepe, with which they were certainly in contact, but whose influence was not so radically

present and involved in their lives to have been able to bring about any change in their basic social structure. Reference to the Mesopotamian model in the ritual and ideological sphere linked to the authority probably suggests some prior influence, perhaps manifested in the Ubaid period, which may have led to emulation and hybridization phenomena mainly restricted to the elite and to their public activities, further legitimizing their status and role.

The economic and political strategies of the Arslantepe leaders, who governed the community by exercising their prerogatives of authority and prestige precisely in these sacred buildings, appear to have been very closely correlated with the Mesopotamian model. In these buildings, in addition to presumably managing ritual and ceremonies, the leaders would have performed political/economic functions by managing the circulation of foodstuffs with the distribution of meals in ceremonial events and "feasts" (Dietler and Hayden 2001; Helwing 2003; Pollock 2003). The Arslantepe temples have yielded thousands of mass-produced bowls, made with a different manufacture technique from the typical Mesopotamian beveled rim bowls (by using the slow wheel and scraping the base), but on an equally mass-produced basis (Guarino 2008), together with several hundred clay sealings that bear the impressions of numerous seals, almost all stamp seals (Fig. 8). Since Temple C has been completely excavated, the positioning of the materials found there has made it possible to reconstruct the function of the rooms and the ways in which the activities were performed. In the central room, the bowls were found untidily scattered on the floor south of the wide platform/podium, left there after use; many hundreds of bowls were conversely found in the two eastern side rooms standing upside down and partly piled up, both on the floor and in the collapse layers (Fig. 8a, b), showing that the bowls must have been stored in these rooms to be ready for use (D'Anna and Guarino 2010; Frangipane 2012a).

All the clay sealings in Temple C were concentrated in one part of one of the side rooms (Fig. 7b) and had perhaps fallen from a shelf or a collapsed upper story, where they must have been temporarily kept after removal from the containers. In Temple D, conversely, a large number of sealings had been discarded in a series of dumps, which also contained hundreds of bowls, in what must have been originally a stairwell (Figs. 7b and 8c–d). This material is still being studied, but at first sight it was immediately clear that sealings were frequently found bearing the impressions of the same seals in the same dump layers, as if they had been grouped together by type of operation, or by the official concerned, before being discarded. Our reconstruction of the way the administrative system at Arslantepe operated in the later period of the palace, based on a thorough analysis of the sealings, their positioning in the layers, and their mutual associations (Frangipane 2007c), makes this discovery extremely important and suggests that this efficient and sophisticated system for controlling and recording transactions before writing existed as early as this prepalatial phase.

The distribution of food that took place in these ceremonies was therefore carefully controlled and managed, even though it probably had to be ideologically presented in the form of ritualized events. This must have been made possible by the capacity of the elites to centralize staple goods, presumably on the strength of their social prestige and their possible function as mediators with the divinities, on which
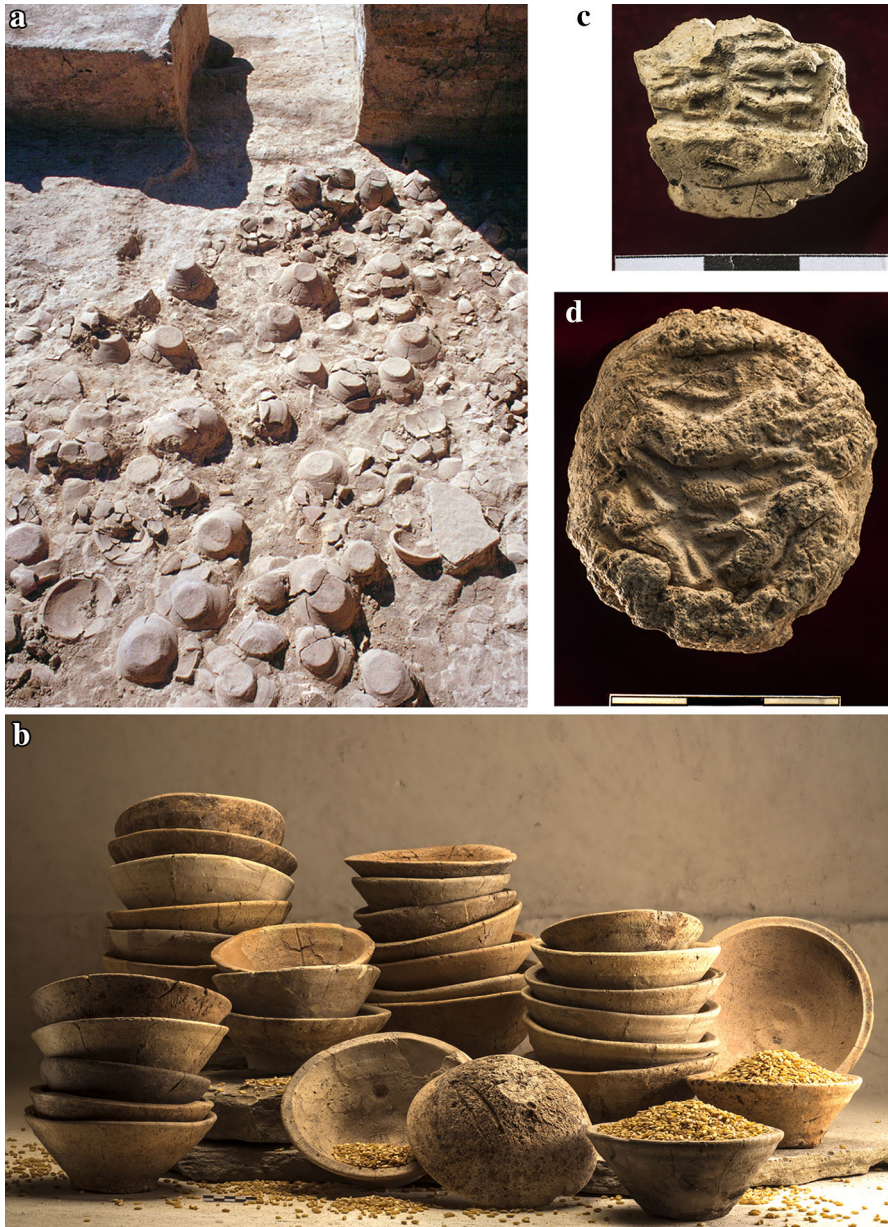
Fig. 8 Arslantepe, period VII materials from the temple area. **a**: Bowls scattered on the floor of one of the side rooms in Temple C; **b**: Mass-produced bowls from the temples; **c, d**: Clay sealings (*cretulae*) from Temple D (Photos R. Ceccacci)

their prerogatives as rulers also were presumably based. As Earle (1997, pp. 153–154) has stated: "Large-scale ceremonies require leadership to finance them with resources mobilized from the group. In hosting large-scale feasts, a leader

demonstrates the capacity to marshal quantities of food beyond the reach of others. Another way to control ceremonial events is to increase their organizational complexity, that is, the specialized nature and number of component elements required for their performance." Even though redistribution must have taken place on the occasion of feasts and ceremonies, they must have set in motion a widening and self-fueling system in which the redistribution of food bolstered the prestige of the leaders, and their enhanced prestige increased their capacity to acquire resources and perhaps also manpower services, which they remunerated at ceremonial distributions of meals. The leaders had therefore probably started to interfere in staple production.

A change also took place in the type of domestic fauna present in the level of the temples, in contrast to what has been found in the other period VII buildings and levels, including elite residences. There was indeed a considerable increase in sheep and goat in the temple area, compared with cattle and pigs, which were more numerous in the houses—more cattle in elite residences and more pigs in the dwellings of common people (Bartosiewicz 2010). Such an increase of sheep and goats in these buildings may have been due to the emergence of a new pattern of animal husbandry. Early forms of central intervention in pastoralist practices, or in the relations with transhumant pastoralists, must have been aimed at encouraging specialization in caprine management, as these animals were more mobile, less interfering on agriculture, easier to mobilize, and exploitable for dairy products (Zeder 2010). These assumptions are supported by the subsequent further development of sheep and goat breeding and/or their use in the central environment in the palace period (period VIA).

The Secularization of Power: The Palace at Arslantepe

Both temples were abandoned around 3500–3400 BC. It is difficult to establish the exact date of this abandonment because these buildings were not destroyed by fire, unlike most of the buildings at Arslantepe; not enough charred materials have been found to establish a reliable series of C14 dates. The abandonment of this important and politically central sacred area, confirmed by the discovery of six almost intact bodies of bats in situ on the floor of Temple C (probably nested when the roof was still partly in place) (Bartosiewicz 2010, p. 129), is all the more interesting when one considers that what was built in its place immediately afterwards reveals a radical change in the concept of public spaces, the way they were used, and the system and very concept of power itself.

Between 3370 and 3300 BC (period VIA, Late Chalcolithic 5), a complex of imposing buildings, all architecturally linked and largely intercommunicating, intended for various kinds of correlated public functions, was built immediately east of the period VII temples, partially superimposed on the ruins of Temple D.

The First 'Palace' Nucleus

The earliest core of this huge architectural complex was built on the highest part of the mound, once again immediately south of a complex of elite residential buildings

that had been built on the same area where the previous elite residences from period VII had stood (Fig. 9). In this case it was not a sacred area dominated by temples, but a huge courtyard (A1414) at the end of which stood an imposing building
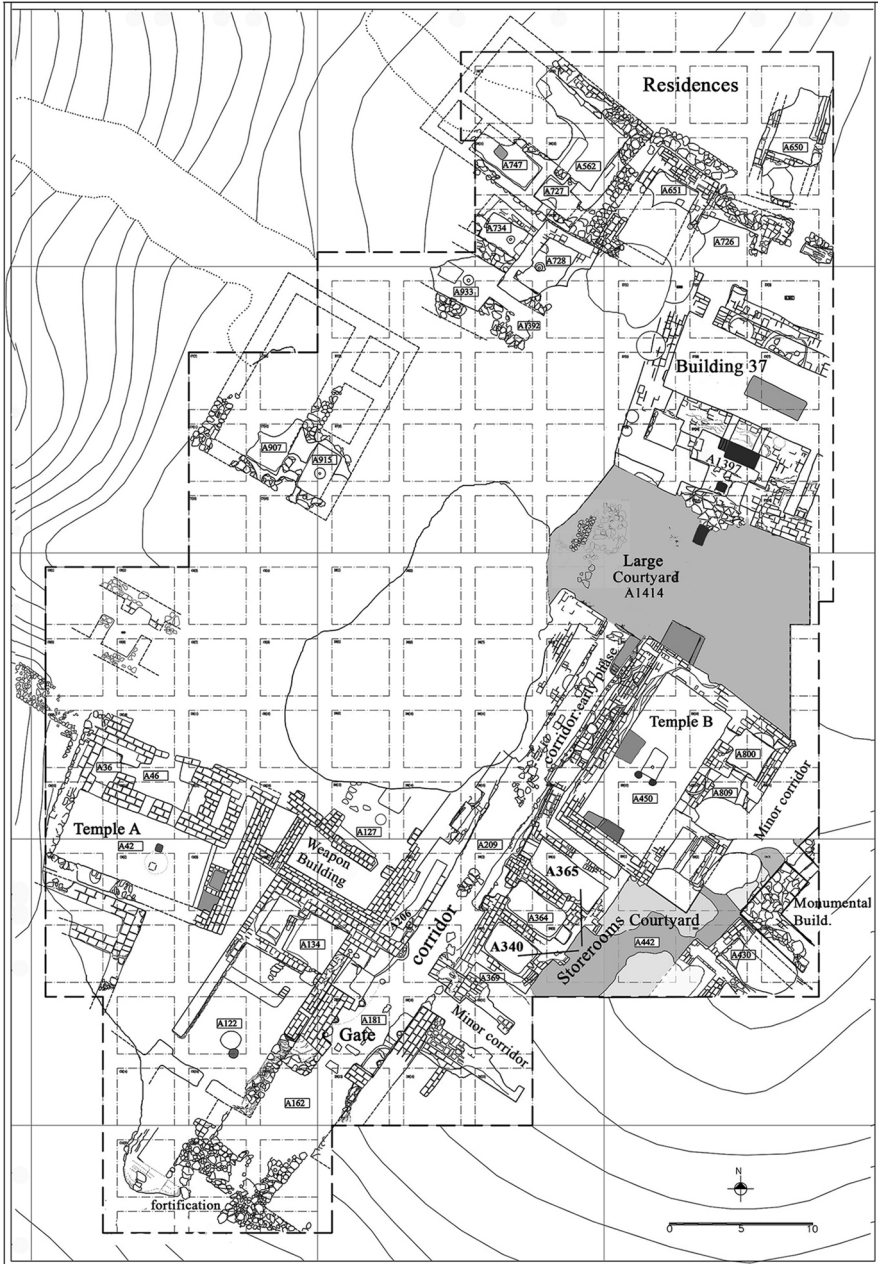

Fig. 9 Arslantepe, plan of the period VIA palace complex (LC5, 3400–3100 BC) (Arslantepe archive)

Fig. 10 Arslantepe, period VIA. Building 37, the Audience Building. **a**: View from above; **b**: View from the courtyard (Arslantepe archive)

(Building 37) with very thick 1.80 m mud-brick walls (Fig. 10). This building was much smaller in extension than the previous temples, had a bipartite floor plan made up of a large room and a single row of two small rooms, and did not exhibit any element resembling any kind of cultic or religious function. The large room, furnished with a low clay platform with a fireplace, similar to the one found in Temple C but longer and narrower, perhaps a kind of banquet table, could be reached only through one of the small side rooms and therefore was not designed to be accessed by the public, reserved for a few people. No cultic or special objects were found in this room, which communicated with elite residences to the north (Fig. 10a).
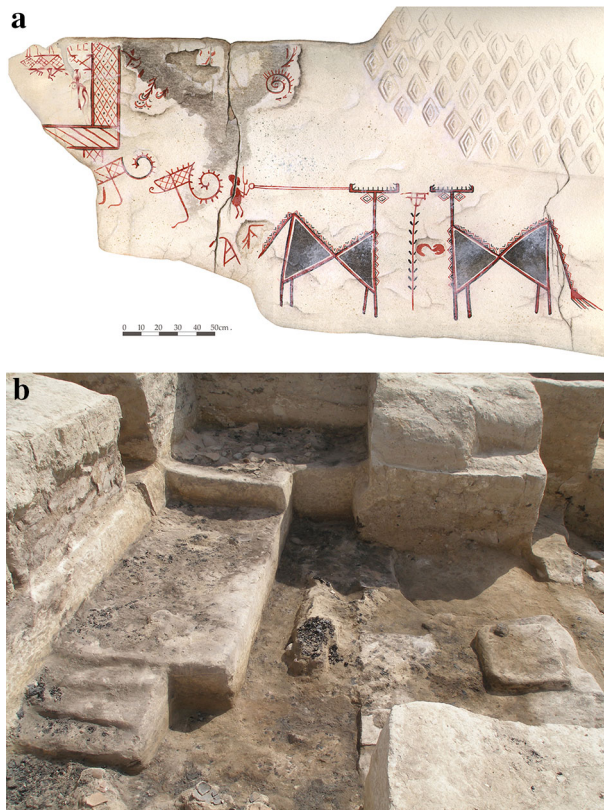
Fig. 11 Arslantepe, period VIA. **a**: Wall painting and decoration on the eastern wall of the corridor (drawing by T. D'Este); **b**: The mud-plastered base with three steps leading up to the small "throne" room opened onto the courtyard (A1397)

The place designed for contact with the public was the central side room, which had a wide opening leading to the large courtyard, where a large number of people could gather, entering through a corridor with walls decorated with stamped lozenge motifs and wall paintings (Fig. 11a). The small room was almost entirely occupied by a high platform or base, with three steps leading up it, on which the charred remains of pieces of juniper wood with diameters of about 8–9 cm were placed (Vignola personal communication 2016). These pieces were of a kind and size different from the majority of other wood pieces found in the room that probably belong to beams collapsed from the roof. This suggests that a mobile wooden structure, such as a seat or throne, had stood on the platform (Fig. 11b). Entry to the little room with the platform was from the courtyard via a stone ramp or staircase, at both edges of which were two small raised clay bases facing the platform, built perfectly in line with each other and with the platform (Figs. 9 and 10b). These bases probably marked the places where visitors had to stop when presenting themselves to the person in authority. Building 37 and the courtyard might therefore have been places where the ruler addressed the public and gave audience to people
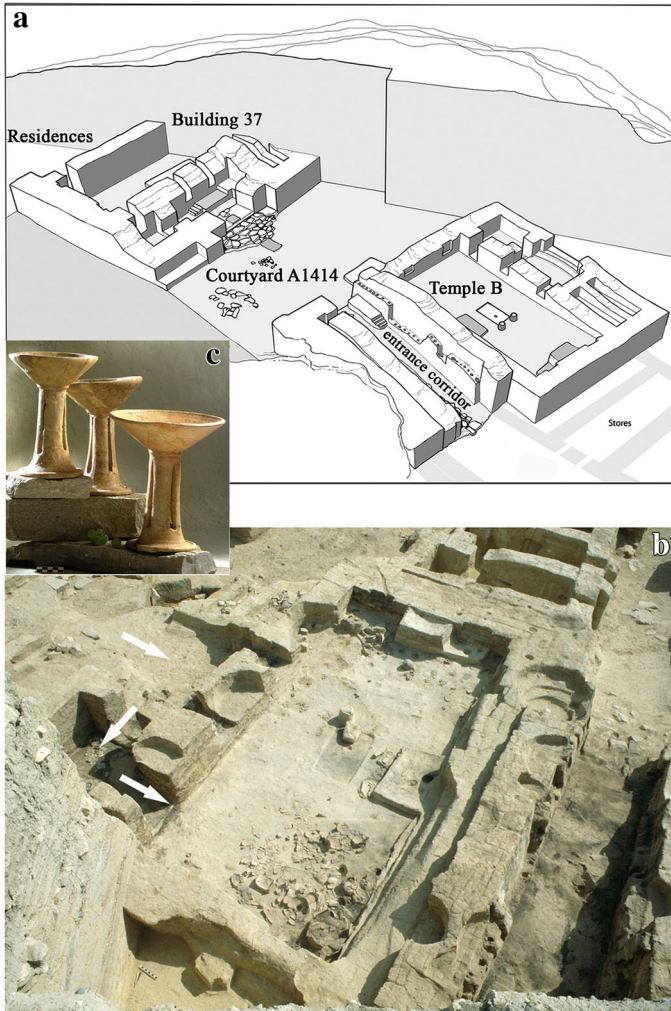
Fig. 12 Arslantepe, the oldest sectors of the fourth millennium palace. **a**: 3D drawing of the courtyard and Building 37 (by C. Alvaro); **b**: Temple B with materials in situ; **c**: Three high-stemmed bowls found in front of the altar in Temple B (Arslantepe archive)

gathered in the wide courtyard, in a ceremonial environment without any cult or religious connotations.

This building, which almost certainly had two stories, was the core of the new public area and stood out in front of the visitors when they enter the courtyard in all of its monumental splendor. The new public area, in its early phase, apart from Building 37, the large courtyard, and the access corridor, also included a temple (Temple B), whose floor plan was very similar to that of Building 37, but whose in situ materials and internal features are evidence of its use for cultic purposes (Fig. 12). There were two altars and two small podia associated with a rectangular

hearth in the main hall, and the pottery consisted of only a few medium to large mass-produced bowls—made on the fast wheel, as all the bowls from Arslantepe period VIA—three high-stemmed bowls used as cult vessels before the main altar (Fig. 12c), a few extremely rare Mesopotamian vessels, probably imported, large jars for preparing and containing food, and a larger-than-usual quantity of adult cattle bones (Bartosiewicz 2010, fig. VI.8; Frangipane 1997). These elements all indicate that ritual meals also were taken in this temple, but unlike in Temple C, the ceremonies and cult practices must have been reserved for only a few people, probably of high status (D'Anna 2010). Unlike the situation in Temple C, access to the cult room was limited and restricted, since, as in Building 37, there was only one way to enter the main hall, passing through one of the small side rooms. The public was therefore left outside and may have seen the ceremonies through two windows in the wall separating the entrance and the cult room. It may be significant that the wall decorations, made of red impressed lozenges and traces of painting, were in the side rooms, where the public must have remained, and not in the cult room, as was the case in the earlier temples that were frequented by large numbers of people.

It therefore would appear that a process had begun to exclude the population from the collective ceremonies and rituals, and the place in which authority was exercised was no longer a sacred place, but a broad space where people gathered and the ruler appeared publicly and acted directly without any religious mediation. Even though the religious legitimacy of the leaders still must have been the main rationale for the consensus to their authority and the stability of their power, as evidenced by the symbolic importance of the linkage between cult ceremonies in Temple B and high-status groups, the ways and the public practices through which the authority of the rulers was exercised seem to have radically changed, becoming more secular, while the separation and the ideological detachment of the ruling elites from the rest of the population grew wider.

Palace Expansion

New sectors were soon added to the first core of the public complex, enormously expanding it southward along the slope of the mound until it occupied an area of about 3500 m^2 (only in the part that has been excavated so far; Fig. 9). The monumentality and planning, the architectural and functional differentiation between sectors, and their close linkage that made a unitary whole, using the slope to raise buildings with high symbolic and functional values at higher altitudes, make it possible to define this exceptional architectural complex as a very early form of a full-fledged palace (Figs. 13 and 14). Building 37 remained the political heart of the whole complex until the end, as shown by the concern to ensure that the platform-throne occupied an overriding visible position from the very entrance to the palace, even after adding new sectors. The linkage between this building and the elite residences on the summit of the mound, uniting the residential and the public areas into a single whole, also confirms and strengthens the interpretation of the Arslantepe complex as a first, anomalous, and original experiment of the Near Eastern palatial systems.
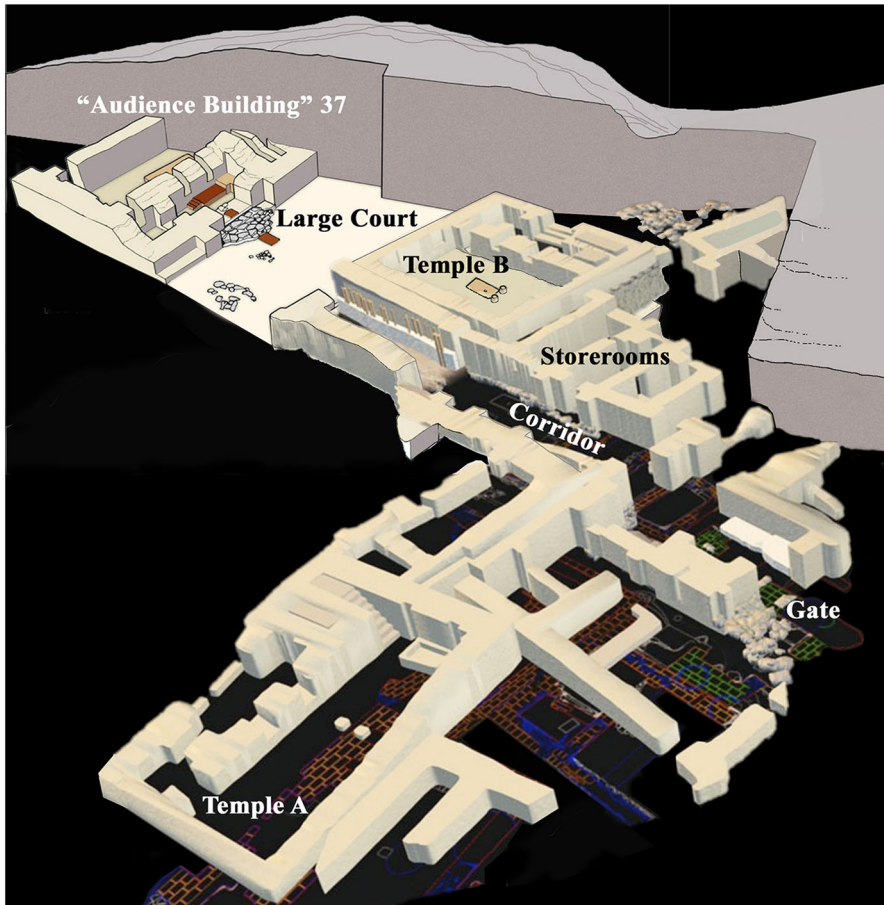
Fig. 13 Arslantepe, period VIA. 3D drawing of the palace complex (public sectors) with its later expansion (end of the fourth millennium BC) (by C. Alvaro)

Identifying and studying this precocious manifestation of a process that took place in other regions much later on, and analyzing its specific and innovative features as well as its weaknesses, underscores the complexity and variety of the dynamics that, in different regions, led to the formation of the state. As some scholars have suggested, it was a nonlinear, regionally diversified, and experimental process, made of innovative developments as well as failures (Wilkinson et al. 2014; Wright 2006, p. 307). The political economy of the Arslantepe rulers does not seem to have changed substantially, but they seem to have remarkably expanded their control over the production and circulation of staple goods, further enhancing their capacity to interfere in the basic economic life of the population, also by increasingly centralizing the labor force (Frangipane 2010b).

The new sectors were mainly intended for economic–administrative activities and official events. The center of the economic transactions of the elites was no
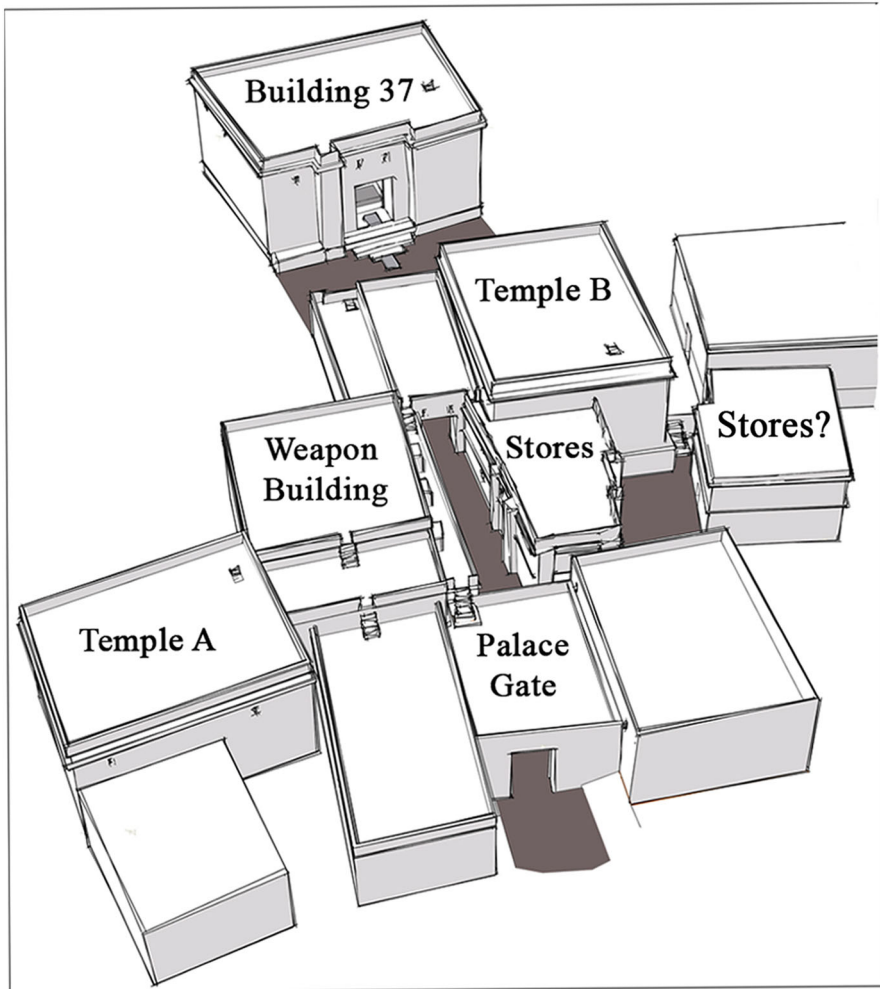
Fig. 14 Arslantepe, reconstruction of the fourth millennium palace complex (public sectors) brought to light so far (by C. Alvaro). The structural analysis of the palatial complex has been based on both its architectural features and the materials preserved in the collapse layers, such as beams fallen from the roof, collapsed mud-brick walls, traces of plants used in carpentry. Accurate analysis of the dynamics of the collapse and the stratified deposits allowed us to identify at least two stories in various buildings and to distinguish the material assemblages that were originally located on the upper stories from those lying on the ground floor. These data cross-checked with the technical analysis of the masonry (thickness, texture, orientation, development of the construction phases) are the basis for this three-dimensional sketch. The sketch should be considered preliminary and it shows only the excavated portion of the public sectors of the entire complex. The three-dimensional reconstruction of the residential quarters to the north of Building 37 is still ongoing (C. Alvaro)

longer in the temples but in a set of store rooms, where foodstuffs were kept to be redistributed, mainly in the form of meals, to large numbers of people, no longer on special and ceremonial occasions but as regular, routine practices. We can hypothesize that these people did not take part in any collective rituals and did not

reach the real "places of power," but they likely visited the palace to be received by the ruler in political and social events (in the large courtyard and Building 37) and to receive remuneration for their work in an area set aside for this purpose.

Only three storerooms have been excavated, but there were probably other rooms used for the same purpose that opened onto the other side of an adjacent courtyard (Figs. 8 and 14). The materials found in these storerooms indicate a clear distinction in their specific function. The central room was a sort of passageway, originally also leading to the courtyard with which it communicated through a door that was subsequently closed. The northern room was a full-fledged storeroom full of large jars, *pithoi,* and bottles, perhaps used to supply the southern room where meals were distributed (Fig. 15). In this smaller room communicating with the courtyard, in addition to three *pithoi* and two jars, more than 100 mass-produced bowls and 130 clay sealings were found, some still in place close to the containers they had sealed, and many others were stacked in a corner of the room, near the door to the courtyard (Frangipane 2007d). Combining these data with those taken from the various assemblages of more than 2,000 clay sealings that were systematically discarded in several parts of the palace has made it possible to reconstruct the existence of a sophisticated administrative system that used the removed clay sealings as documents attesting the transactions performed (Frangipane 2007c). After removal, the clay sealings were set aside and kept for a certain period of time before being discarded in controlled dumps after they had been accounted for. This study of the clay sealings at Arslantepe and the reconstruction of the relationship between the used seals and the related administrative functions (sealing of various containers and/or different types of doors) also has shown that there was a hierarchy of officials with different tasks and responsibilities (Fiandra and Frangipane 2007b). The glyptic is strictly local in character and makes reference to the northern iconographic and stylistic traditions, with a few rare exceptions of cylindrical seals of Mesopotamian inspiration (Pittman 2007). The sealing operations moreover had all been performed on the spot (Blackman et al. 2007, pp. 396–414).

We are therefore faced with a highly centralized system revolving around the management of staple commodities, which partly interfered with production circuits by encouraging some products and helping optimize agricultural practices (Balossi Restelli et al. 2010; Masi et al. 2013). Livestock raising also underwent significant changes with a further sharp increase in sheep and goat, particularly sheep, which suggests a growing specialization in pastoralist activities, presumably stimulated by the interests of the centralized economy and the ability of the ruling class to control the pastoralist component (Palumbi 2010). No actual grains have been found in the storerooms and a large amount of animal bones (mainly caprines) was a distinctive feature of the small redistribution storeroom A340. Remunerating a large number of people in the form of meals in a nonceremonial environment as a matter of routine, and the development of a sophisticated system of administrative control over these redistributions, as in Mesopotamia, indicates increasing control over the labor force; this itself suggests a probable accumulation of means of production (land and livestock), which that labor force must have made productive. Accumulating wealth in the form of foodstuffs, which by their very nature are perishable, only could have been intended to be reinvested in the feeding of workers, thus generating a constant

Fig. 15 Arslantepe, the palace storerooms. **a**: Clay sealing (*cretula*) depicting a high-status person in a sledge car (*tribulum?*), from the discarded *cretulae's* archive; **b**: The distribution storeroom A340 with in situ materials; **c**: Vessels from room A340 after restoration; **d**: Reconstruction of the original location of vessels and materials in the storerooms, based on the positioning of sherds and findings on the floors (drawing by T. D'Este, from Frangipane 2007c, chapter I, fig. I.6)

flow of income and outgoings (Frangipane 2010b, 2016). This also is evidenced by the smaller size of the storerooms of this period, and not only at Arslantepe, which were not intended to store huge quantities of goods but to be continually filled and emptied. Increased administrative complexity, which was necessary to control these flows, was therefore the outcome of such a system and political economy.

The Peculiar Features of the Arslantepe Centralized System and Its Collapse

The centrality of the staple economy in this pristine form of state is similar to what certainly must have underpinned the Mesopotamian centralized system, but at Arslantepe it was ideologically manifested differently. In the only images that appear to represent the ruler, he is depicted closely and symbolically linked to agricultural practices. One scene, which may be of plowing (or threshing?), formed part of a wall painting in the section of the corridor leading to the main courtyard and Building 37 (Fig. 11a), and an image with the figure of a leader being carried on a thresher sledge car (*tribulum*) followed by a procession of individuals bearing pitchforks also is recognizable in the impressions of a cylinder seal, unique at Arslantepe (Fig. 15a) (D'Anna 2015; Frangipane 1997). In both cases, one or two oxen are pulling the car, driven by a coachman. The scene on the seal recalls, with a style of its own, a similar representation found at Uruk on both a seal and a small stone plaque (Frangipane 1997, pp. 66–67, figs. 15–16; Littauer and Crouwel 1990), showing that this specific image had been selected among the many that were linked at Uruk to the representation of power.

Although more than 260 seals have been recognized at Arslantepe from their impressions, there were no scenes of prisoners or ritual scenes of temple ceremonies, and not even images of offerings at the temple, as was the case at Uruk-Warka. There were very few images in general showing the human figure in the Arslantepe glyptics, and they never show codified distinctive traits designed to represent a ruler or priest, apart, perhaps, from the aforementioned case of the figure on the sledge car in which the prerogatives of the leader are suggested from his central, sitting position on a chair covered by a canopy, and the possible indication of hair or headwear, totally absent in the few other examples of human figures. The great majority of seals were stamp seals, mostly depicting animals; in a few rare instances they depict humans, usually shown frontally in a somewhat static position, often associated with some symbolic objects. These objects also clearly referred to activities that were evidently important in the ideology of Arslantepe, but they did not refer to the sacred sphere: the pitchfork, people carrying goods on their backs, a toothed element referring to such activities as agriculture and the movement of foodstuffs.

The power of the ruling class at Arslantepe, as in Mesopotamia, was based on their capacity to manage staple resources and to control their flow and circulation through a complex system of delegated powers that were entrusted to increasingly numerous bureaucrats and individuals with administrative responsibilities working on behalf of the ruler, according to a hierarchy of functions. But I think that the new hierarchies lacked the solid social base (well-rooted hierarchical kinship ties) that

they probably had in southern Mesopotamia and the resulting powerful ideological-religious legitimation that had consolidated their power there.

Furthermore, Arslantepe lacked the urban structure that had created an organic and strongly integrated political–economic system of specialized and interdependent sectors, both in the southern alluvial plain and in central-eastern Jezira. While the dimensions of the public area and its activities increased, the whole site became smaller in size, increasingly keeping the people out of the settlement and excluding them from participating in the most important events and ceremonies of the central institutions, thereby probably widening the gap between the elites and the common people. The society of the Malatya plain seems to have been essentially a dichotomous society consisting of dominant elites living on the site and dominated people who must have been living in scattered villages in the plains surrounding Arslantepe. There is no evidence of a lower town down the mound, and indeed very few findings from this period emerged in the survey of the plain (Di Nocera 2008). That may have precisely been due to the fact that the people probably lived in small villages and farms scattered around the site, which are covered today by deep alluvial deposits and by the dense vegetation of intensive cultivation (Frangipane and Di Nocera 2012).

The absence of an urban structure also likely was due, as in many other areas in the north, to the limited extension of the Malatya plain, where the mountains must have prevented the expansion of the agricultural land, though it was highly productive and rich in water supplies. This environmental situation also would have encouraged systematic and intense relations with the pastoralist communities moving through the mountain chains. This relationship has been clearly evidenced at Arslantepe by the exponential growth of specialized pastoralism in the palace period, revolving around sheep rearing (Palumbi 2010), which already was becoming evident in the previous Temple C phase. Some evidence, such as the presence in the palace of handmade red-black pottery—the so-called Red-Black Burnished Ware—belonging to a completely different tradition from the local and Mesopotamian-related Late Chalcolithic ware and linked to the northern Anatolian world, as well as the subsequent events following the destruction of the Palace, suggests that the increased importance of sheep/goat rearing in the centralized economy was the result of having attracted these pastoralists and incorporated them into the economic system of the palace rather than because of direct interference by the elites in pastoralism management. The basic independence of the involved productive groups prevented the possibility of greater and more radical interference by the central institutions in the economic life of the people, which was conversely what occurred in the fully urban systems.

Artisanal craftwork at Arslantepe does not seem either to have been wholly centralized or controlled by the ruling class, and no evidence has been found of any areas of workshops on the site and near the public area. While ceramic wares, mostly made on the fast wheel, had become much more standardized and specialized in terms of the repertoire of shapes and manufacture compared with the previous period VII (D'Anna and Guarino 2010; Frangipane 2002; Frangipane and Palmieri 1983), it seems to have been due mainly to the need to satisfy the more demanding elite customers, who wanted both larger volumes of wares (storage

vases, huge numbers of bowls) and more sophisticated items, emulating and aesthetically more akin to the ceramics of their "powerful" Mesopotamian Uruk cultural neighbors. We do not have any evidence of direct central intervention in the work of potters. Yet an influence may have focused particularly on the products that were used for holding liquids and semi-liquids (necked jars) and for redistributing meals in the palace (mass-produced bowls), while the handmade manufacture of cooking pots and *pithoi* seems to have remained more linked to the traditional domestic sphere (D'Anna 2010, 2012; Frangipane 2002; Frangipane and Palmieri 1983). The most substantial change that occurred in ceramic production in period VIA compared with period VII is precisely the greater internal differentiation of classes and wares, with the emergence of at least three totally different types of products, perhaps also made by different potters. Wheel-made and handmade wares, referred to above, were joined by a third, wholly different kind of ware—the so-called Red-Black Burnished Ware mentioned earlier—which also was handmade and mainly used for producing a few categories of "luxury" vessels, such as bowls, cups, small jars, and high-stemmed bowls, all of which were used as tableware and for cult purposes. This very particular production, which had started to emerge in the final phases of period VII, was not dominant but also was not unimportant; it compares with similar pottery from central-northern Anatolia (Çalıskan Akgül 2012; Palumbi 2008a), whose manufacturing techniques also spread to more eastern regions, including the South Caucasus. This ware appears to have been related to pastoralist groups and communities living in the mountain regions south of the Black Sea, which, between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third millennia BC, formed part of the circle of the so-called Kura–Araxes culture (Chataignier and Palumbi 2014; Palumbi 2008b).

The red-black vessels in the palace might be one of the signs of the interaction with and perhaps the presence of the pastoralist groups frequenting the zone who increasingly may have been attracted by a center like Arslantepe, which also could herald the establishment of new relations and offer new outlets for their products to Syro-Mesopotamian areas. These products also may have included metals. Metallurgy underwent a great development in the fourth millennium, and at Arslantepe this has been evidenced by various objects made of copper composite alloys with arsenic and lead and a few items in precious metals such as silver and gold. The role of metallurgy in the elite sphere also has been highlighted by the well-known group of copper weapons (9 swords and 12 spearheads) discovered in one of the palace buildings (Building III) (Di Nocera 2010; Frangipane and Palmieri 1983). The composition of these weapons and the shape of the spearheads are identical with two similar spears found subsequently in a public or communal building belonging to a seasonal settlement of transhumant pastoralists that settled on the ruins of the palace after its destruction (period VIB1) (Frangipane 2014). They also recall identical examples in a very unusual and special burial, the so-called Arslantepe Royal Tomb, which contained a vast collection of metal objects (75) dating back to 3000–2950 BC and almost certainly belonging to the end of these pastoralist occupations when the palace system had long since ceased to be active (Frangipane et al. 2001). It is therefore possible that the pastoralists, who frequented regions that were very rich in metal ore deposits, may have brought metal products and technologies into their

exchange networks with the early state centers with which they interacted. If this assumption is correct, it also would support the suggestion that the Arslantepe elites did not directly interfere in artisanal craft production, or did so only to a limited extent, even though they conditioned and steered it by their demand for these products.

But the capacity of early state institutions to aggregate and integrate the different components, which was very pronounced in urbanized contexts, was limited in the case of Arslantepe by the comparative autonomy that the rural and pastoralist population there must have managed to retain. I think this population must have continued running their subsistence economy in a domestic and traditional manner, simultaneously performing services and paying tributes presumably imposed on them by the central authority, judging from what we know of the phases immediately following the collapse of the centralized system. This means that the interests of the population must have been in conflict with those of the central authorities, whose increasing demands may perhaps have become ever more unsustainable. The complex relationship created between the ruling class and the common people must have led to direct conflicts, which could not be absorbed by a multiplicity of competitive dialectical relations that could be put in action in multistratified and urban societies. It was probably these contrasts and tensions that weakened the palace system, increasingly also exposing it to possible outbreaks of conflict with the pastoralists, until this caused its definitive collapse. Archaeological data confirm that, after the destruction of the palace by fire at the end of the fourth millennium BC, the pastoralist component first gained the upper hand and occupied the site on a seasonal basis, but maintained its symbolical and political centrality in the territorial organization of the transhumant groups (period VIB1) (Frangipane 2014). Shortly after, the site reverted to being a rural village (period VIB2) (Frangipane 2012b). There were no further traces of the old power system or of any new forms of state organization for hundreds of years thereafter, even though Arslantepe continued to be a benchmark site in the Malatya plain.

Power at Arslantepe was given a massive boost and rapidly and substantially soared between 3400 and 3200 BC, giving rise to an extraordinary and precursory early state "experiment." The type of power exercised by the ruler and the way it was exercised (through delegation to bureaucrats) made the ruler more akin to a king than a chief (Spencer 1990). But the premature establishment of this new type of authority was not accompanied by the balanced growth of the whole socioeconomic system and the type of economic and political integration of the territory. On the contrary, the new authorities seem to have engendered tensions and conflicts. In this context, the development of an ostentatious display of military power and new fighting techniques and methods, as suggested by the sophisticated weapons found in the palace and by the very premature presence of the sword, were not an indication of the strength and increased tendency to expansion of the centralized power system, as was subsequently the case in mature states and empires. This evidence, on the contrary, was a sign of fragility, weakness, and the need for self-defense, perhaps against threats posed within the system itself.

Shared Features and Diverging Trajectories in the Formation and Organization of Pristine States in Greater Mesopotamia

The analysis I have presented here of the essential traits of the formative processes of centralized political systems in the two main regional nuclei of Northern and Southern Mesopotamia and at Arslantepe in the Upper Euphrates region has shown basic parallels that may be attributed to commonly shared historical roots dating back, perhaps, to close relationships that were established as early as the fifth millennium BC and shaped similar economic and political formations. The numerous shared features that have characterized the development of early state societies throughout the various regions of Greater Mesopotamia have led some scholars to consider this phenomenon a result of the expansionary policies of southern Mesopotamian centers (Algaze 1993, 2001, 2008). They emphasized the role played by trade and commercial demands in stimulating asymmetrical interregional relations and thereby pushing for political and cultural change.

Deeply rooted interregional relationships among communities, even over large areas, have certainly characterized the Greater Mesopotamian regions and have played an important part in the development of fifth and fourth millennia societies (Butterlin 2003), in some cases also encouraging social and political changes (as is the case with the transformation of northern societies in the Ubaid period) (Frangipane 2001, 2007a). But while commercial pressures may have been increasingly important in the emerging hierarchical Mesopotamian societies of the fourth millennium BC, I think they have been overemphasized as driving forces behind political change in Mesopotamia (Algaze 1993, 2001; Emberling 2002; Spencer 2010, pp. 7123–7124; Stein 1999a).

I do not deny that trade and territorial expansion may have played a role in the dynamics of the formation of political elites, centralized systems, and even forms of early states in certain other regions of the Near East. For example, in another well-known pristine state, namely Late Predynastic and Protodynastic Egypt, conflicts and interregional trade may have exerted considerable influences that strengthened the leadership of chiefs in what had originally been small, mobile, and tribal communities in a highly constricted environmental context (the Nile Valley hemmed in by desert) (Wengrow 2006; Wenke 2009). Managing trade and defending the community also may have significantly contributed to the consolidation of power of elite figures or paramount chiefs in the system of peer polities with little or no evidence of economic centralization in Western Anatolia and in the Eastern Mediterranean in the course of the third millennium BC (Efe 2002, 2007; Frangipane 2010c; Horejs 2014; Horejs and Mehofer 2014; Özdogan 2002; Parkinson and Galaty 2009).

I do not think, however, that trade and colonial strategies were of major importance in the dynamic of state formation in fourth millennium Greater Mesopotamia. I agree with Algaze and others that it certainly intensified in the course of the fourth millennium and provided the dominant elites with new instruments and tools (exotic materials and luxury objects) to display their prestige and power as a demonstration of their ability to "control" resources, further

widening the social divide separating them from the other members of the community. However, while trade very probably helped express and increase inequality and the privileged status of certain individuals, becoming an "enabling factor whose potential lay in the display of social order" (Yoffee 2005, p. 36), there is no suggestion that its "economic" role in the strict sense was an important factor in the strategies of the political economy of the Mesopotamian pristine states. The archaeological data currently at our disposal on the Mesopotamian world as a whole suggest that, in this formative phase, the political economy of the first central institutions was essentially focused on centralizing foodstuffs and the means of producing them (land, livestock, labor), creating a sort of entrepreneurial system in which surplus was converted into labor, which in turn produced more surplus and wealth in various forms (Adams 1966, 2004; Frangipane 1996, 2001, 2016; Liverani 1998; Pollock 1999, pp. 78–116, 2001). This system, as evidenced from its widespread development in the course of the fourth millennium, formed the basis of the social and political dependency relations underlying the way of operating of the new central institutions in all the territories of Greater Mesopotamia. As nondurable wealth, these goods must have been reused continuously in the form of remuneration for services rendered (meals and food rations), thereby fueling the production circuit. In this framework, albeit in certain contexts and especially in urbanized environments, this circuit also led to a substantial development of artisanal craftwork. Trade still may have played only a relatively small economic role in the fourth millennium. Based on archaeological data, apart from the already well-established flows of materials such as obsidian and timber, which probably still were obtained through traditional channels and relations, the goods produced from nonlocal, exotic materials were not so much to meet primary needs or economically significant demands of society (i.e., to produce tools or objects for daily use, which continued to be mainly made of traditional materials), but to circulate mainly in elite environments and the sphere of prestige, representing the "social order" (Frangipane 2010a). Even the few metal weapons that began to appear at the end of the fourth millennium, do not yet seem to have been intended for widespread use for routine military operations, as they have been found only in public and elite areas, mainly used for display and probably limited practical purposes (Di Nocera 2010; Frangipane and Palmieri 1983; Lenzen 1959).

Although long-distance trade was practiced and probably intensified in the fourth millennium, it probably was not one of the drivers and principal causes of the northward expansion and spread of the Southern Mesopotamian model, as Algaze has suggested in his reconstruction of the interregional relations of this period as one-sided, between a "center" and "peripheries," according to world-system theory (Algaze 2001; Gunder Frank and Gills 1993). The applicability and adaptability of this model to early Mesopotamian societies have been reviewed and challenged by various authors in various ways (Butterlin 2003; Frangipane 2001; Johnson 1988–1989; Pollock 2001, pp. 219–221; Schwartz 2001; Stein 1999a). But there also are a number of underlying problems that make this explanatory approach problematical. First, as rightly pointed out by Kohl (2011, pp. 79–81), southwestern Asia, and in particular the wide areas around the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys, was "not structured systematically into a single core region surrounded by semi-peripheries

and peripheries….." It "consisted of multiple core areas loosely integrated or overlapping…" This also applies to most preindustrial and premercantile societies, making the very concepts of center and periphery, on which the model is based, misleading for early societies.

Analyzing the colonial settlements on the Syrian Middle Euphrates (the only sites that can be undoubtedly considered colonies)—Sheikh Hassan, Habuba Kabira, and Jebel Aruda (Boese 1995; Strommenger 1980; Strommenger et al. 2014; Van Driel 2002; Van Driel and Van Driel-Murray 1983)—they seem to have been settlements founded and occupied by large groups of southern populations and not by small sectors mainly engaged in commercial activities, as shown by the large size of Habuba Kabira (possibly covering 18–20 ha). In these colonial sites, moreover, there is no substantial evidence of exotic findings, in the form of either objects or raw materials, nor evident remains of specific workshops, whereas there is conversely good documentation of intense administrative activities, very probably relating to the internal circulation of staple goods (Frangipane 2001, 2009; Van Driel and Van Driel-Murray 1983). As Pollock (2001, p. 221) has stated: "Emigrants from Southern Mesopotamia quite likely included peasants with a variety of skills as well as artisans of various sorts… It would have been these people who had the skills to reproduce Uruk-style material goods … , not the "specialized merchant groups" who are said to have composed the trade diaspora." The economic dimension of trade in these societies must not have been so important as to lead to the establishment of very remote trading colonies, which would have been very difficult to manage and control politically. The capacity of the emerging states to exercise territorial control and the political and military instruments needed to exercise that control could not yet, in my view, have been strong enough to permit the Southern Mesopotamian authorities to impose their dominance or even to condition such remote colonial settlements (Frangipane 2001, 2009; Frangipane and Algaze 2001; Pollock 2001). It is possible that the small "foreign" groups that, in the course of the Uruk period, settled northward in small communities inhabited by local people, such as Hacinebi (Stein 1999b, 2012; Stein et al. 1996), Zeytinli Bahçe (Frangipane 2007b), and Hassek Höyük (Behm-Blancke 1984; Helwing 2002), or even the Uruk-linked groups (we do not know how large) in large centers such as Tell Brak (Emberling 2002; McMahon and Oates 2007), moved from colonies on the Middle Euphrates rather than from the south, as the result of increasingly intensive interactions between the colony inhabitants and the local communities.

There was certainly an increase in specialized crafts in need of supplies in the course of the fourth millennium, particularly in large urban centers such as Uruk-Warka and Tell Brak. Although it is difficult to understand the nature of the relationship between the artisans and the central institutions from archaeological documentation alone, there is no clear evidence of the centralization of craft activities and products in the main investigated sites. The central stores were used for foodstuffs, and administrative practices seem to have been performed mainly to regulate and control agricultural activities, animal breeding, land management, and food distribution. The only case where craft activities might have been centrally controlled to some extent was perhaps in the public area of the Eanna at Uruk, where the gigantic scale of the activities performed in an extremely vast urban

context ($\sim$250 ha, in which the public area alone exceeded 6 ha) may have led to forms of interference in the organization of certain craft activities by the powerful central institutions (Nissen 1974). This also may be inferred from the lexical lists in the pictographic tablets of phase IVa (end of the fourth millennium BC) (Nissen 1986, 2015; Nissen et al. 1993). But even in this case, it is difficult to imagine that the central authorities of Uruk, whose political hinterland still must have been relatively limited considering the presence of other neighboring and probably competing urban centers in the same floodplain (Adams 1981), would have had the necessary instruments for exercising the political and military control needed to sustain and run full-fledged trade agencies installed thousands of miles away, as would have been the case in an "imperial" context.

A recent analysis by Blanton and Farger (2008, p. 14) has emphasized the effect produced on the development of elite domination and political centralization by a power strategy based on the use of "external resources" as a means of being less dependent on the subaltern class (the "taxpayers" who produce "internal resources"). This theory is similar to the distinction between "staple finance" and "wealth finance" (D'Altroy and Earle 1985; Polanyi 1944), and emphasizes the importance of exotic goods in the political economy of emerging ruling elites. The idea that control over the production and circulation of luxury goods strengthens the power of the ruling class by widening their sphere of action and giving them a new source of wealth is certainly intriguing. I believe that it is more likely that this kind of political economy applies to later periods, when state institutions were more mature, better consolidated, and more able to manage and control the different spheres of production. There is no evidence that it was the prevailing strategy of the fourth millennium emerging states.

On the other hand, the long-term research at Arslantepe has shown a local, original, and peculiar process of growth of a powerful centralized society in the Upper Euphrates region. This development certainly occurred within the framework of a system of features long shared with contemporary Mesopotamian communities. At the same time, a series of profound differences allows us to identify distinct formative cores and different types of organization of pristine states in the Greater Mesopotamian world, which were due to local factors and led to diversified, and sometimes opposite, specific developments and outcomes. Here I briefly review and summarize the main features of state formation phenomenon, comparing their nature, importance, and effects.

Common Features

Economic centralization is the most commonly shared feature in all the areas examined and revolved around the centralization and management of subsistence resources and the control of the labor force, which was probably employed in various elite activities and mainly in the production of those staple goods that were constantly put back into circulation by feeding more people and laborers. By so doing, the system "expanded," and not only centralized but also produced wealth. What mainly characterized the economic strategies of the Mesopotamian pristine states was their focus on the staple economy. Centralized intervention in artisanal

craft production must have differed from one zone to another, depending on the level of urbanization and the resultant degree of economic integration between the productive and social components.

Developing sophisticated and wide-ranging administrative practices to keep control of the management, circulation, and reallocation of goods, especially foodstuffs, was another feature shared by the centralized societies of the Mesopotamian world. The procedures for sealing and documenting transactions using clay sealings (*cretulae*) began and developed in Northern Mesopotamia as early as the Neolithic (Akkermans 1996) and became widespread everywhere in the phases of increasing centralization, as the most appropriate means of controlling the movement of numerous goods circulating around an increasing number of people, by appointing "trusted" individuals to perform this control in the name and on behalf of the central authority. The development of these systems, for which new instruments (hanging ovoid *cretulae*, hollow spherical *cretulae,* or *bullae*, complex tokens) also were introduced in some complex urban contexts in the fourth millennium, led to the emergence of a new class of bureaucrats, who, by administering goods on behalf of their rulers, in reality were vested with delegated powers, also broadening the leaders' ability to exert political and economic control over the territory.

Institutionalizing power by setting up seats and institutions for the exercise of political authority and/or performing the activities of the ruling class was another aspect that spread quite generally, in various ways and with or without cult-religious mediation, throughout the fourth millennium, parallel to an increased political control. Political centralization was the fourth feature shared by the societies we have analyzed, though varying in the capacity and the extent to which the rulers were able to integrate and control the territory. This authority was clearly evident everywhere and also was symbolically expressed, in different ways and forms, in the monumental buildings that served as seats of power, in the objects used to display that power, and, at times, in codified iconographies and images.

Diversifying Aspects

Signs of complex and multilevel social stratification can, in my opinion, be detected in Southern Mesopotamia alone, where there seems to have been a society subdivided, from the beginning, into large and probably competing families in a natural environment characterized by differing conditions in terms of resources and soil quality. Southern Mesopotamian societies, judging from the little archaeological data we have for the fifth and fourth millennia, seem to reveal a kind of horizontal stratification (within kinship groups) that, particularly in this environmental context, must have encouraged internal competition and conflicts of interest between the different social components, then also bringing about a vertical stratification that cut across family groups and within them, creating high-rank figures and emerging ruling elites. Social and economic struggles must have been endemic in those societies, involving complex dynamics of interaction between different sectors at various levels.

Insufficient evidence exists to be able to say whether such complex internal diversification also had or had not existed in Northern Mesopotamia, in which both the social–economic organization of the original Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic communities and the environmental conditions must have been markedly different. But it almost certainly did not exist in the Upper and, perhaps, Middle Euphrates region.

The importance and role of religious ideology and cult practices, which were significantly present in all early state societies in the Mesopotamian world, seem to have been particularly important in a context of social struggle as that of Southern Mesopotamia. In the south, ideology and cult practices were probably harmonizing factors intended to tone down conflicts and clashes and to create ideological cooperation and unity, fostering social cohesion. There is no comparison between the fundamentally sacred character of the immense public area of the Eanna at Uruk and any of the public seats in northern sites, even though the latter also had temples and ceremonial spaces and in some cases had substantial urban proportions, as at Tell Brak.

I have suggested that urbanization was a factor only in some of the areas affected by the phenomenon of political and economic centralization, particularly in the Southern Mesopotamian alluvium and the Khabour basin and the neighboring areas of central-eastern Jezira. This was a source of stability for the nascent state, strengthening the diversification of productive sectors, their structural interdependency, and the role of state institutions in fostering integration, creating new demands for manufactures and new products, and guaranteeing systematic interaction with the territory, thereby promoting the regular flows of surplus food for the urban population and the circulation of manufactured goods between cities and their hinterlands. In urbanized areas, the institutions must have exercised control over the whole production system, gradually broadening the political economy of the central institutions to also include artisanal craft products and "wealth finance."

Some relations with the territory also may have necessarily been established by nonurban early state centers, like Arslantepe, but probably only in terms of defining the area and the groups with which the ruling class would establish systematic relations and from whom it could extract goods and labor. That relationship was not, in my opinion, comparable to the strong political control and territorial integration that existed in urban environments. This also probably applied to relations with nomadic pastoralists, who were kept under closer control in the urbanized state systems, but were much more dialectical and unstable at Arslantepe and in nonurban systems.

The process of power secularization was quite advanced at Arslantepe, unlike the marked religious ideological connotation of the Mesopotamian rulers, which appear still to have been bound up with the sacred sphere. The precocious emergence of a palatial complex at the site, though it had a different layout from the third millennium Mesopotamian palaces, was a precursor of their functions. The new nature of the ceremonies, which changed from inclusive in the previous Late Chalcolithic 3-4 to exclusive and reserved to the elites, and the secular manner of displaying and exercising the authority of the ruler, evidenced by the recent findings

in the site, all highlight the strong top-down character of political power, the marked detachment of leaders from the rest of the population, and their ability to impose their authority without the need of any religious mediation. As we have seen, on the one hand this was an indicator of the precocious maturity of the early state system, which could afford to place less dependency on the ideological instruments of consensus and manifested a strong institutionalization of the political power. On the other hand, the lack of deep-rooted social entrenchment and strong territorial integration reveals that the early state at Arslantepe was a premature and fragile experiment, which then went into crisis and collapsed.

Some Concluding Remarks

I cannot say whether the state always and everywhere developed from earlier types of chiefdoms, but from what has been observed above, we can identify distinctive features of "pristine states" in the Near East that enable us to distinguish them from other types of society governed by political leaders and identify their presence in only a few regions in the formative phases of the fourth millennium BC—Greater Mesopotamia, in its broadest sense including Susiana in southwestern Iran and the Arslantepe region in southeastern Anatolia, and Egypt. The pristine states in Greater Mesopotamia share four principal features.

First, state institutions *produce wealth*. They not only appropriate it to themselves, they create an *increasing economic subordination of large numbers of people*, enforcing a highly invasive political economy over the production of the population. This means *economic power* (Yoffee 2005, pp. 34–38). Wealth, in these forms of pristine state, was accumulated very rarely in the form of durable wealth, and when it was, it was intended mainly to be a means of displaying the elite position in the social order. For this reason, I do not consider the production of this kind of wealth as representing real economic power. At all events, in these contexts, durable wealth, which mainly took the form of metals, was not hoarded and/or obliterated in burials, as was the case in other forms of nonstate leadership power, where wealth was "sacrificed in spectacular performances" to express the privileged social status of elite figures (Wengrow 2011, p. 137). Real wealth finance as part of the political economy of the ruling class was found only in mature states in Mesopotamia with an urban base, once they had acquired the ability to attract huge surpluses and create the conditions for incorporating wealth production and circulation into the state production system.

Second, the rulers *delegated power* through a class of intermediate individuals (the bureaucrats) who operated in their name. Since the bureaucrats worked on behalf of the ruling class and certainly owed allegiance to them, this transfer of tasks made the power structure even more top-down and not distributed between local leaders, as was often found in chiefdom-type societies. The delegation of power therefore became *political power,* and since it referred above all to the administration of goods, in this phase, it contributed to the *economic power,* too.

Third, *power and the ways it was exercised became strongly institutionalized*. Public, often monumental, areas were created with codified functions and

characteristics in which the rulers carried out all their functions and their performances embodying the institutions. That process also became *political power*.

Fourth, *power tended to become secular*. Forms of *increasing exclusion* and *segregation* of the population from the elite and the government sphere were in process. The public was allowed to attend only certain performances and participate in economic–administrative and political activities. This process varied widely in the forms adopted and the level of intensity achieved from one region to another, and, as I have shown, the pace quickened and became more intense in the geographically more peripheral and socially less stable society of Arslantepe.

The other two aspects that are usually deemed essential for the definition of a state, namely, *complex social stratification* and *urbanization*, do not appear to be constituent elements applicable to the generality of pristine states in these regions, but in Lower Mesopotamia and the Khabour basin, where they were present to varying degrees, they were a source of strong *social* and *political power*, which strengthened the solidity and stability of the state institution.

The different degrees and roles of these factors, particularly urbanization, had major effects in terms of the outcome of the state formation process in different regions in the north and south. Their full development in highly urbanized societies resulted in the establishment of solid and enduring institutions (susceptible to reorganization but not to collapsing), whereas their absence or weakness was a cause of vulnerability and fragility of these same institutions in nonurban contexts, where the comparative autonomy and independence of the rural and pastoralist population produced or fomented phenomena of resistance, leading to all-out systemic collapse.

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