

Socio-economic Structure of the Highlands of Eastern Anatolia Region before Urartian Kingdom

Ayşegül Akin Aras

Introduction *

The region of Eastern Anatolia, located at the crossroads of cultural regions such as the Near East, the Caucasus and Iran. It is bordered by the Kura depression in the northeast, with the Urmiye Plateau in the east, with the line drawn by the Euphrates in the west and the area up to the Taurus Mountains in the south. Undoubtedly, the highland East Anatolian geography, which consists of mountain ranges reaching up to 3000 meters in height and plain areas, is one of the most difficult regions of Anatolia, both geographically and ecologically. However, the ecological niches that we encounter in the topography of the region constitute the suitable living environment for settled life. Moreover, the Eastern Anatolia region has a specific location in the sense that the region is always in interaction and communication with these cultural zones through the rivers of Kura, Araxes, Euphrates and Tigris, which rise from its soil.

In this geography, in which high and rough mountains and continental climate have been shown, agriculture has been capable of meeting only the vital need. On the other hand, the extensive and wide grasslands and meadows help to improve livestock breeding. It is possible that the “Culture of Nomads”, which was historically dominant in the Eastern Anatolia region, could be the result of such a geographic obligation.

Although animal husbandry was an indispensable life form and economic model for this geography, the fact remains that it was not the only livelihood, as the region has rich obsidian and mineral resources. Undoubtedly, these conditions had been decisive in the survival of people in this difficult geography. They used the surplus of these raw material resources as reserved product and provided interregional transfer via rivers.

One of the most important factors in the development of people’s way of life, culture and economies is geography. At this point, this natural progress did not work differently in the highlands of the East Anatolian Plateau as well and the people had adapted to this harsh geography and these lands had hosted many idiosyncratic cultures. The archaeological processes for these cultures in the region have been partially revealed. In this case, the reasons such as the difficulty of the region, the insufficient research attempts and, most importantly, the lack of written tradition in the pre-Urartu period have been causing slow progress. We will try to evaluate the archaeological history and also the economic structure of the region with the limited archaeological data.

An Overview of the Socio-Economic Structure of the Region during the Prehistoric Period

When we look into the geography of the region in general, we encounter some downsides about prehistoric periods. The limited number of archaeological investigations carried out in the region is unfortunately not sufficient to illuminate this period.¹ Especially, in the highlands of Eastern Anatolia, which are situated in the northern part of Eastern Anatolia, this situation seems more serious, while the southern plains offer more information. The salvage excavations carried out in 1960s for the dam construction had tremendous effects. The data from the area of the plains will help us clarify the prehistory of the highlands area.

When we have a look at the Paleolithic period of the region, a bleak picture awaits us in correlation with the scarcity of the research. However, the existence of prehistoric settlements that share mutual cultural characteristics with the neighboring southern Caucasia, reveals the potential of Eastern Anatolia. It is considered that the people with African roots in Georgia-Dmanisi,² performed their movement of migration from Africa to Dmanisi through Eastern Anatolia. Because of its natural territory, the habitable climatic conditions and most importantly, rich raw material resources are enough reasons for the inhabitants of the Paleolithic period to migrate here, even for a short period of time. Although the lithics (stone tools) from the Paleolithic age obtained from the regions of Erzurum, Kars,³ Tunceli, Elazığ and Van prove the existence of settlement in the period within the region, it is not possible to talk about the economy of the region based on the few individual tools from this period. However, when we look to the south of Eastern Anatolia, it gives us data of the communities that provided their livelihood through hunting and gathering, and it is valuable data, since it indicates the possibility of similar communities living in the highlands region. It is exciting to note that the stone tools and product wastes found at the Gürgürbaba Hill (Van), which have been discovered as a result of the surveys in recent years, demonstrated that this was the living area of the Lower and Middle Paleolithic people, and that the tool production techniques and the way of life did not change.⁴ The excavations that will continue in Gürgürbaba Hill in the coming years are certain to shed light on the prehistory of the highlands area. The data we have is mostly concentrated in the southern part of the region. Nonetheless, rock paintings, which has been a question at issue, are noteworthy for the highlands region.

Unfortunately, the archaeological data in Eastern Anatolia during the Neolithic period is very weak. In the excavations conducted during early periods, the rock paintings were found in Yazılıkaya, Kurbanaga Caves (Kars),⁵ Gevaruk and Tırşın Highlands⁶ (Van-Hakkari). As a result of stylistic evaluations on the dating of these rock paintings, many opinions were raised and the Neolithic period was the most widely accepted. However, these evaluations have never been based on analyses that

will enable us to have clear information on the rock paintings.⁷ The systematic research on these rock paintings, which are considered the way people express themselves, will enable us to have an idea about the history of these communities and their lives. As a matter of fact, the animal figures depicted in the rock paintings of the highlands region show the fauna of the region and their developing economies. These artefacts unearthed in the high parts of the highlands of East Anatolia lead us to the concept of the “*mountain neolithic*”. Strong Neolithic traces seen in the neighboring regions Georgia and Armenia support this claim.⁸ How did it all progress in Eastern Anatolia in the Neolithic Age when the foundations of the settled life were established? This is a matter of fact. Therefore, it is assumed just as an offer that the hunter and gatherer aceramic tribes living in southeastern Anatolia went to the north following the droves. It is also thought that tribes in search of raw materials and livestock, have arrived in this region and shaped its economy accordingly. At this point, the most important determining factor in the economic base of the region is the raw material relationship network based on obsidian. Thanks to its obsidian dominant raw material potential, the eastern Anatolia Region has attracted the attention of the prehistoric humankind and these resources have been utilized. Thus, as a result of the studies conducted, it is observed that the Neolithic settlements of both Caucasia and the Near East supply their raw material needs from Eastern Anatolia.

Southern Caucasus Centred Agriculture and Livestockbreeding Communities

Having a look at the Chalcolithic period of the region, it is identified that the obsidian-based trade continues also in the periods of Halaf and Obeyd. The ceramics belonging to the Mesopotamian cultures are also observed the other regions of Eastern Anatolia, particularly in Tilkitepe. Also, foundlings of obsidian and mine in the settlements of the culture exist. All of these are important in revealing the commercial relations and connections with southern cultures. The reality that Tilkitepe is located quite close to the obsidian resources and the obsidian kernels and tools obtained from the settlement, strengthen the perception that this region was an obsidian distribution center and commercial hub.⁹

In this period, one of the most important and distinctive details is that the two worlds divided into the north and south in this region becomes much more evident starting with the Chalcolithic period. While the south of the Taurus Mountains gets integrated with Mesopotamia, the northern side is more local and it is more interactive with southern Caucasia. In the south, it is possible to mention the existence of a regular economic system and specialized animal husbandry, especially in the Arslantepe settlement, where the foundations of political centralization were laid, and on the other hand the economic model of independent and pastoral lifestyle in the mountainous region was remarkable.

The recent studies show that the earliest settlement period in the highlands of Eastern Anatolia starts at the beginning of the Chalcolithic Ages.¹⁰ In the studies carried out in limited time, unfortunately, sufficient data has not been able to provided on the cultural and economic structures of the region. It is observed that the communities in this region have a cultural and economic structure following the Neolithic and that they are made up the local tribes based on peasantry, agriculture and livestock breeding. It is seen that there is ovine breeding just like the Late Neolithic period as well as there is cattle breeding towards the ends of Early Chalcolithic period. The most eligible data about the region are the Sos Höyük excavations.¹¹ Sos Höyük VA layer (the late-Chalcolithic phase) revealed the existence of a simple village with a strong architectural tradition and city walls, and culture based on agriculturally supported animal husbandry and mixed food economy in the region.¹²

Kura-Araxes Peoples and Emergence of Pastoral Groups

At the Upper Euphrates Basin, where the Uruk system integrated with Mesopotamia, Arslantepe reveals that it has a progressed economic system.¹³ Yet, due to an unknown reason, this system collapses and a crisis arises towards the end of the 4th millenium. The pastoral groups in crisis coming from the north caused the rise of a new culture. This new rising culture appearing in the Kura- Araxes Basin, locally known as Kura-Araxes Culture, spreads across all of Eastern Anatolia.¹⁴

With the beginning of Early Bronze Age, the traces of this culture, which manifested itself in a large part of the Eastern Anatolia, demonstrated itself in a wide geography from the Caucasus to the coasts of the Levant, the the Caspian coast to the Central Anatolian Plains. It is known that these communities that had settled or semi-nomadic lives in northeast Anatolia and Lake Van Basin lived on the agriculturally supported livestockbreeding.¹⁵ This way of life, which is very similar to today's plateau model, also shows in materials very specific to the culture. One of the most important of these materials are portable hobs, which had been common in Kura-Araxes and nomadic culture.¹⁶

In this period of change, a complex socio-economic structure emerges in many fields such as agriculture, ceramic production, etc. The tools such as bronze and stone sickles, flint microliths and grinding stones are evidence that these groups were engaged in agricultural activities. The variety of agricultural products is not dissimilar from the Chalcolithic Age and the amount of the production varies. The puddled clay silo obtained from Van-Dilkaya Mound show that though small-scale, the storage of the agricultural products is systemized.¹⁷

In the Kura-Araxes Culture, it is observed that the main economic model was specialized livestock breeding, the sheep and the goat breeding continued in the Early Bronze Age as in almost every period. However, in Sos Mound settlement, which is

located in the mountainous area, it was revealed that secondary production in animal husbandry remained a secondary importance.¹⁸ Additionally, the tools such as awl, auger, needle, spindle, spool and textile parts made by using animal bones and horns show that weaving/textile were also carried out.¹⁹

Data on the fact that the mining was another important economic model for this highlands geography with the agriculture-supported animal husbandry has been provided from the settlements in this period. According to the evidence of the metallurgical activities and the metal work inventory of the early excavations of Karaz, Pular and Güzelova, and the recent finds from Sos Mound, the region had close relations with the Caucasus during the Early Bronze Age.²⁰

Kurgan Peoples

Towards the end of the Kura-Araxes culture, through the migrations from the north, dynamism arose within the region. Thanks to the people coming from northern Caucasia, the region gets introduced to a new culture. The most remarkable cultural remains from these communities, whose traces can be found especially in the southern Caucasus, northwestern Iran and in some parts of the Eastern Anatolian plateau, are cairn-like tombs, high quality painted ceramics and rich metal finds unearthed from these tombs.²¹ Known as the “Kurgan peoples”, through these nomadic communities, life in mounds was over. The reason for the lack of data on settlements is that the communities of this era were pastoral groups and embraced the full nomadic way of life.²² Under the light of this information, it is observed that the socio-economic structure of these communities, which are known as the first elites of the highland, an economic model based totally on stock farming developed.

Period of Beyliks

These transhumant nomadic people, later form tribes and principalities socio-politically based on kindredship. We know these principalities, which were present in the Late Bronze- Early Iron age, through their monumental castles and graveyards. It is seen that this system had a substructure that would shape the Urartu economy. There is data that animal husbandry and small-scale agricultural activities constituted the primary economic model. The grain silos gathered from the Karagündüz excavations have evidential value.²³ The changes in socio-political structure were reflected in the economic structure.²⁴ It is inferred that control of livestock and pastures was provided by the fortresses built on the plateaus. Above all, it would not be wrong to say that the livestock economy is shaped and organized in a way that it bears no similarity with the previous periods of Eastern Anatolia, if the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age castles is considered.

It is thought that the diverse mining potential and production had an impact on the chiefdoms in the Early Iron Age in Eastern Anatolia to construct fortresses and join together to become the most important power and state structure of the Near East under the name of Urartu Kingdom. Evidence of this situation are hundreds of items, weapons and ornaments made of iron found in the cemetery areas of Ernis, Evditepe, Karagündüz, Hakkari, Şorik and Yoncatepe. In particular, the number of finds and content of them are very rare in the areas of Transcaucasia and northwestern Iran, and the development of iron metallurgy spread from Van region to neighboring regions.²⁵

Conclusion

It is very difficult to talk about the economic structure of the cultures in the archaeological history of the highlands of the East Anatolia Region before the Urartu Kingdom. The lack of research due to the hard conditions in this area and especially, the fact that acquisition of written tradition only occurred with the Urartus, are the challenges we are facing.

Unfortunately, the fateful destiny of the Eastern Anatolian geography is that the unchanging primary economic subsistence source is livestock. It is seen that specialization in animal husbandry has only been realized in time when the economy based on livestock supported agriculture has not changed in the historical process. Another determinant factor in the economic basis of the region is the raw material network. It is obvious that the people of the highlands of East Anatolia developed an economic system based on these two elements in almost every period.

In Eastern Anatolia during the migration of people to the Caucasus, animal husbandry and the resources of the region played a leading role for the settlements. Due to the obsidian potential of the region, it became a destination center during the Bronze Ages and provided raw materials via rivers and connection roads.

After the emerging of the Chalcolithic period in the region, the mineral deposits came into the commercial scene as another source of raw material. The transfers carried out from rich mine deposits to Mesopotamia and the data on metallurgical activities obtained from the settlements emphasize the importance of mining in Eastern Anatolia economics.

After the Chalcolithic Age, the region hosted many culturally different communities throughout the Bronze Age, but it transformed without changing its socio-economic structure. With the socio-political changes experienced in the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, the economy of the mountainous Eastern Anatolia was coordinated and most importantly, this process formed the foundations of the Urartian economy.

Notes

* This subject has been discussed more comprehensively in Turkish in a book titled “Economic and Agricultural Life in the Ancient Ages of the Anatolia” Gökçek – Yildirim – Pekşen 2018, 459–544.

¹ Kökten 1947, 223–236; Koşay 1972, 128.

² Gabuni et al. 2001, 158–170.

³ Kökten 1944, 659; Şenyürek 1944, 351; Goetze 1957, 15; Kökten 1985, 428.

⁴ Baykara et al. 2016, 539–552; Baykara et al. 2017, 295–314; Baykara et al. 2018, 27–41.

⁵ Kökten 1944.

⁶ Özdoğan 2004, 28 f.

⁷ Tümer 2017, 163–173.

⁸ Badalyan et al. 2010, 185–218; Lyonette-Guliyev 2010, 219–228.

⁹ Sağlamtimur 2001, 15. However, many researchers have opposed the idea of Tilkitepe’s network of obsidian-oriented relationships with southern cultures. It is noteworthy that such a small-scale settlement within a 3-hour distance cannot be the center of such a commercial network. Tekin 2017, 343 f.

¹⁰ Erkmen-Altunkaynak 2017, 237–262.

¹¹ Işıklı 2011, 230–233.

¹² Sagona-Sagona 2000, 55–127.

¹³ Frangipane 2009, 24–41.

¹⁴ Işıklı 2011.

¹⁵ Piro 2009; Işıklı 2012, 103–112.

¹⁶ Işıklı 2011, 76 f.

¹⁷ Çilingiroğlu 1993, 471.

¹⁸ Palumbi 2010, 158–160.

¹⁹ Frangipane et al. 2009, 16–22; Arslantaş 2013, 382–392.

²⁰ Sagona-Sagona 2000, 64, fig. 48. 49; Işıklı 2008, 55–79.

²¹ Miron-Orthmann 1995, fig. 67. 68. 72. The tradition of ceramic products in the region, the settlement plans and the innovations in the burial customs are related to the changing socio-economic and political structure. The rich metal finds recovered from the Cairns and these Cairns give us a picture of an elite ruling class and a newly beginning social hierarchical structure. Therefore, these communities were called „the first elites of the highlands“. Işıklı 2018, 78.

²² Özfirat 2001, 108–116.

²³ Sevin et al. 2000, 850.

²⁴ Belli-Konyar, 2003, 92; Erdem 2011, 59–68.

²⁵ Belli-Konyar 2003, 91.

References

Arslantaş 2013

Y. Arslantaş, Tarih Öncesi Dönemde Harput ve Çevresinde Tarım ve Hayvancılık Fırat Üniversitesi Harput Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi Geçmişten Geleceğe Harput Semzpozumu 23–25 Mayıs 2013 Bildiri Kitabı (Elazığ 2013) 367–392.

Badalyan et al. 2003

R. S. Badalyan – A. T. Smith – P. S. Avetisyan, The Emergence of Sociopolitical Complexity in Southern Caucasia: An Interim Report on the Research of Project ArAGATS, Archaeology in the Borderlands: Investigations in Caucasia and Beyond, in: A. T. Smith – K. S. Rubinson 2003, Archeology In The Borderlands. Investigations in Caucasia and Beyond (Los Angeles 2003) 144–166.

Baykara et al. 2016

İ. Baykara – B. Dinçer – S. Şahin – E. Koç – D. Baykara – İ. Özer – M. Sağır, 2014 Yılı Van İli Neojen ve Pleistosen Dönemleri YüzeY Araştırması, Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı 33 (Erzurum 2016) 539–552.

Baykara et al. 2017

İ. Baykara – B. Dinçer – S. Şahin – E. Koç – D. Baykara – İ.H. Bolkan, 2015 Yılı Van İli Pleistosen Dönem YüzeY Araştırması, Araştırması Sonuçları Toplantısı 34 (Edirne 2017) 295–314.

Baykara et al. 2018

İ. Baykara – B. Dinçer – S. Şahin – E. Koç – E. Ünal – R. Kuvanç – B. Gülseven – Ö. Birol, Van İli Neojen ve Pleistosen Dönemleri YüzeY Araştırması-2016”, Araştırması Sonuçları Toplantısı 35 (Ankara 2018) 27–41.

Belli – Konyar 2003

O. Belli – E. Konyar, Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi’nde Erken Demir Çağı Kale ve Nekropoller, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları (İstanbul 2003).

Çilingiroğlu 1993

A. Çilingiroğlu, Van-Dilkaya Höyüğü Kazıları Kapanış, 14. Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı 1 (Ankara 1993) 469–492.

Erdem 2011

A. Erdem, Doğu Anadolu’nun Demir Çağ Aşiretleri, Tüba-Ar 14, 2011, 59–68.

Erkmen – Altunkaynak 2017

M. Erkmen – G. Altunkaynak, 2016 yılı Alaybeyi Höyük Kazıları, Müze Kurtarma Kazıları Sempozyumu (19–20 Nisan 2017) Bildiri Kitabı (Hatay 2017) 237–262.

Frangipane et al. 2009

M. Frangipane – E. A. Strand – R. Laurito – S. Möller-Wiering – M. L. Nosch – A. Rast-Eicher – A. W. Lassen, Arslantepe, Malatya (Turkey): Textiles, Tools and Imprints of Fabrics from the 4th to the 2nd Millenium BCE, Paleorient 35, 2009, 5–29.

Gabuni 2001

L. Gabuni, Dmanisi and Dispersal, Evolutionary Antropology 10, 2001, 158–170.

Goetze 1957

A. Goetze, Kleinasien, Kulturgeschichte des Alten Orients (Munich 1957).

Işıklı 2008

M. Işıklı, Erzurum'un İlk Madencileri, Atatürk Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Enstitü Dergisi 21, 2008, 55–79.

Işıklı 2011

M. Işıklı, Doğu Anadolu Kura-Aras Kültürü, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları (İstanbul 2011).

Işıklı 2012

M. Işıklı, The Subsistence Economy of Kura-Araxian Folks in Eastern Anatolia: Animal Husbandary and Pastoralism”, Azerbaycanın Erken Ekinçilik Dövrü Abideleri Sempozyumu (Maqalalar Toplusu), Azerbaycan Milli İlimler Akademiası Arxeologiya ve Etnoqrafiya İnstitutu (Bakü 2012) 103–112.

Işıklı 2018

M. Işıklı, Dağlık Doğu Anadolu Yaylasının Erken Halkları, Aktüel Arkeoloji 64, 2018, 72–79.

Koşay 1972

H.Z. Koşay, Pulur (Sakyol) Kazısı, 1970, ODTÜ Keban Projesi 1970 Çalışmaları, (Ankara 1972) 127–138.

Kökten 1944

İ.K. Kökten, Orta, Doğu ve Kuzey Anadolu'da Yapılan Tarih Öncesi Araştırmalar, Belleten 8/32 (Ankara 1944) 659–689.

Kökten 1947

İ.K. Kökten, Bazı Prehistorik İstasyonlar Hakkında Yeni Gözlemler, DTCFD 2/5 (Ankara 1947) 223–236.

Lyonnet et. al. 2010

B. Lyonnet – F. Guliyev, Recent Discoveries on the Neolithic and Chalcolithic of Western Azerbaijan, TUBA-AR 13, 2010, 219–222.

Miron – Orthmann 1995

A. Miron – W. Orthmann, Unterwegs zum Goldenen Vlies: Archaologische Funde aus Georgien (Saarbrücken 1995).

Özdoğan 2004

M. Özdoğan, The Neolithic and The Highlands of Eastern Anatolia, Ancient Near Eastern Studies A View From The Highlands Archeological Studies in Honour of Charles Burney, in: Antonio Sagona (eds.), Peeters (Belgium 2004) 28–29.

Özfirat 2001

A. Özfirat, Doğu Anadolu Yayla Kültürleri, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları (İstanbul 2001).

Palumbi 2008

G. Palumbi, Red and Black Social vs. Cultural Interaction between the Upper Euphrates and Southern Caucasus Communities in the Fourth and Third Millennium BC (Rome 2008).

Sagona – Sagona 2000

A. Sagona – C. Sagona, Excavations at Sos Höyük 1998–2000 Fifth Preliminary Report, Ancient Near Eastern Studies 37 (Belgium 2000) 55–127.

Sağlamtimur 2001

A. H. Sağlamtimur, Urartu Krallığı'nın Ekonomik Yapısı (Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Arkeoloji Anabilim Dalı Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi, İzmir 2001).

Sevin et al. 2000

V. Sevin – A. Özırat – E. Kavaklı Van-Karagündüz Höyüğü Kazıları (1997 Yılı Çalışmaları), Belleten 63/238 (Ankara 2000) 847–867.

Şenyürek 1944

M. Şenyürek, Tebliğler: Anadolu'da Bulunan İki Yeni Alete Dair Bir Not, Dil Tarih Coğrafya Fakülte Dergisi 2/2 (Ankara 1944) 345–352.

Tekin 2017

H. Tekin, Tarihöncesinde Mezopotamya Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Yorumlar ve Yeni Kronoloji, Bilgin Kültür ve Sanat Yayınları (Ankara 2017).

Tümer 2017

H. Tümer, Van Hakkari Dağlık Bölgesi Kaya Resimleri (İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Eskiçağ Bilim Dalı, Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul 2017).