

# **The Economic Structure of the Eastern Anatolian Highlands from the Urartian Period to the End of Late Antiquity – Panel Conclusion**

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The 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Classical Archaeology: “Archaeology and Economy in the Ancient World”, with the panel entitled “The Economic Structure of the Eastern Anatolian Highlands from the Urartian Period to the End of Late Antiquity”. We delivered five different presentations, which focus on the economic structure of the Eastern Anatolian Highlands within the scope of this panel. The economic structure was discussed in detail from the Paleolithic period to Late Antiquity through the instrument of these presentations. In each presentation the economic structure of the period will be studied and analyzed along with the archaeological and cultural background of the related period. In order of presentation, they are as follows:

- Ayşegül Akın ARAS, “Socio-economic Structure of the Eastern Anatolia Region before Urartian Kingdom”
- Mehmet IŞIKLI – Oğuz ARAS, “Observations on the Urartian Economy in Light of the Excavations at Ayanis Castle”
- Leila AFSHARI – Soraya AFSHARI, “The Economic condition of the Eastern Anatolian Highland (Armenia Satrapy) during the Achaemenid Period”
- Elif YAVUZ – Nusret Burak ÖZSOY, “The Economic and Political State of Eastern Anatolia during the Classical Period”
- Ahmet Cuneydi HAS, “Economic Mobility in Eastern Anatolia during the Byzantine Period”

Before the presentations, some general information was provided about regional geography and archaeology. As you know, the Eastern Anatolian Highland is part of the mountainous belt lying between the Taurus Mountains and the Great Caucasus Mountain range, which creates the northern border of the ancient Near East. The geography of Eastern Anatolia, which covers 163,000 km<sup>2</sup>, is formalized by high plateaus, long mountain ranges with heights reaching to 3000 meters, and low, flat depression lines, which lie between the ranges. This high mountainous zone, known as the “Eastern Anatolian Highland”, receives heavy rain and snow because of its altitude, and the water supply is very substantial. From this region rise the major rivers of the Near East: the Euphrates, Tigris, Kura and Araxes rivers, making this region the reservoir of the Mesopotamia and Caucasus world. This vast and varied region is comprised of four cultural and geographical sub-regions. These sub-regions (from north to south) are the Erzurum-Kars Plateau, the Van-Mus Region centered in the Van Lake Basin, the Upper Euphrates Valley connecting between the eastern highland and the northern Mesopotamian lowland, and the mountainous Hakkâri Region located in the southeastern corner of Eastern Anatolia.

As it is observed, this extraordinary region presents adverse aspects, both geographically and environmentally. However, from an archaeological viewpoint, the region is not well known. In addition to this, archaeological research, which has been ongoing for almost a century, can only enlighten us with the general outlines of regional archaeology. We have some knowledge of the prehistoric, late prehistoric and Iron and Classical ages of the region, but we need more details. Now we shall examine the economic structure of the highlands, when considering archaeological periods in the light of available evidence.

As it was demonstrated, our region of Eastern Anatolia is the most problematic sub-region of the ancient Near East in many aspects. The basis of this situation is concerned mostly with geographic and environmental difficulties. These negative conditions, which have arisen from the geographic-climatic situation, have always imposed a hard life on the people living in the hilly zones. The economic systems and structures of the people and culture were shaped according to these conditions within each period. Throughout the ages they had to resort to the main subsistence strategies like animal husbandry and limited agricultural activities. On the other hand, there were some important reasons for staying here: its specific location, and its richness in raw materials. This harsh region has always been on the periphery of, and/or exploited by, imperial powers and great empires. Because of its special location, the region has always been crucial to these powers because of the main routes passing through it, and their control of the hilly zone, by way of borders and road security, was always very important.

Now, the results obtained within our presentations and the periods should be considered and discussed. Firstly, we shall focus on the pre-Urartian Periods, namely from the prehistoric ages up to the formation of the Urartian State. These prehistoric ages, including the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods of the highlands, are the least known periods in terms of archaeology. The Eastern Anatolian Highland has wealthy sources of obsidian, which was a strategic raw material of the prehistoric period, and for this reason the region was unique for prehistoric societies living in neighboring lands. Recently, some projects have shown that an interregional trade network was dependent on the obsidian of the region. The other data group related to this subject is rock art, which can be found in many places in the mountainous zone. Unfortunately, the relevant experts did not systematically study these drawings on the rock facades. According to some scholars these drawings on the rocks, along with some distinct survey materials, were the traces of hunter and gathering groups who were living on the lowlands of northern Mesopotamia during the Upper Paleolithic to Pre-pottery Neolithic periods, and who moved across the highlands for hunting and collecting raw materials.

From the late Neolithic period and during the Chalcolithic period, this sub-region was a target area for the great (and strong) Mesopotamian cultures, such as Halaf, Ubaid and Uruk. The sub-region is one of the significant expansion areas of these imperialist cultural structures. This region is rich in raw materials, always essential for Mesopotamia, which is poor in raw resources. The hilly northern part of the highland had

some relationships with the southern Caucasus during the Late Chalcolithic period. As it was shown, beginning from the Chalcolithic period there were two different cultural zones in the highlands: the southern section, which integrated and faced towards the Mesopotamian world, and the northern section, which was more localized and had relationships with the southern Caucasus.

During the long transition period from the Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age I, a cultural phenomenon, which we call the Kura-Araxes Culture, expanded right across the hilly zone. The semi-nomads and settled societies of this cultural phenomenon survived on a subsistence strategy based on agriculture and animal husbandry. The Upper Euphrates Valley, which was the heartland of a dynamic north-south commercial network, was a center of attraction for these pastoral groups. Towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, new groups from the north, known as the “Kurgan People”, entered into the hilly zone. The societies of this period were mostly moving pastoral groups, and stockbreeding was still the dominant subsistence strategy. Agricultural activities were scarce. From the late Bronze Age to the beginning of the Early Iron Age, the chiefdoms, from which the Urartian State was created, appeared in the hilly zone. This process is known as “Early State Formation” and “Early Socio-Political Complexes” by some scholars.

The Urartian State, which was created in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, was the first central political unit of the hilly zone, and it was during this process that the hilly zone met with the literary traditions and state formation ideas of Mesopotamia. Accordingly, the economy of the highland became institutionalized. The economy was recorded and controlled by political (royal) and religious (temple) powers; however, we do not know the particular roles and activities, which were undertaken. The Urartian economy covered a large domain, which varied from agricultural activities to spoils of war. It is possible to observe some of the details concerning this institutionalized economic system with the help of written documentations such as inscriptions and bullae. One rich Urartian site in terms of written sources is Ayanis Castle, which dates to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The excavations at Ayanis castle have presented us with very rich data including written sources and architectural remains relating to the Urartian economy; however, the Urartian records concerning the economic system are very limited. For this reason we do not know its details, and there are many essential problems related to this subject which remain unsolved.

After the collapse of the Urartian Kingdom at the beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the hilly zone was left unconstrained for a brief period in terms of political control. After a short time this political gap would be filled by the Achaemenid Empire, which was the new superpower of the ancient Near East. The hilly zone was a part of the Armenian Satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire for almost 200 years. Unfortunately, it is not easy to follow the archaeological traces of the Achaemenid Kingdom in the hilly zone, or even Anatolia overall. Our knowledge about the social, political, and economic conditions of the region during this process is very limited. According to some written evidence from

the Persian and Classical periods, the Armenian Satrapy had an important position in the economy of the Achaemenid Empire by way of raw materials such as ores, and by trade routes. Unfortunately, we know very few things concerning the dynamics of the economic structure/system in the Highlands during the Achaemenid period.

The unclear and blurred picture, which we have relating to the socio-economic structure of the Eastern Anatolian Highlands was to continue in this way following the Classical and Late Antiquity periods, including the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. The archaeological traces of Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Empires are very scanty in the hilly zone, although the situation for Byzantium is a bit better. The relationships of the great exploitation empires like Greece and Rome within the highlands were based largely on the supply of those necessary raw materials, which we have mentioned, and on roads and border security. Actually this type of harsh, rugged and rural area with its economy based on agriculture and animal husbandry is not of vital importance to these large-scale economic systems. To control and improve this kind of formidable geography requires a huge budget. Most of the imperialist political powers kept away from attempting these improvements, and they just prefer to exploit them. The hilly zone, including the Eastern Anatolian Highland, has continued to follow its subsistence existence and similar destiny during Classical and Late Antiquity periods. This marginal zone of the ancient Near East has appeared on the periphery of the great empires time after time because of its extraordinary geography, its wealth of raw materials and its special location in dominating trade routes through the ages – a position, which its resilient and tough peoples have never been prepared to sacrifice to outsiders.