From the Prehistoric Village to Early States in Ancient Near East &
The Chalcolithic in the Near East: Mesopotamia and the Levant

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Chronological and Geographic Framework

- Ancient Near East, but specifically Mesopotamia and the southern Levant

- Early Chalcolithic in Mesopotamia: the Ubaid Period
  - 6th-5th millennia BCE

- Late Chalcolithic in Mesopotamia: the Uruk Period
  - 4th millennia BCE

- Chalcolithic Levant (mostly Late Chalcolithic)
  - 5th-4th millennia BCE
The Chalcolithic: an ‘in-between’ time?

- after the “Neolithic Revolution”, before the “Urban Revolution” (in V.G. Childe’s terms)
- this is our perspective, not that of people at the time
- we should also try to understand what this time was for people in past
  - not only thinking about what came after it, what it led to (teleology)

- Chalcolithic means “copper (stone) age”
  - as we will see, little copper in Mesopotamia for most of this time, but a lot in the Levant
  - for many archaeologists these days, Chalcolithic refers primarily to socioeconomic situation, not use of particular raw material
Structure of the course

• Lectures: culture historical background; introduction to material culture; subjects of research and debate

• Seminar: reports on readings
  – deepen understanding of subjects
  – discussion of lecture material

• Seminar presentations: approx. 15 minutes
  – basic structure of author’s argument
  – evidence to support arguments
  – questions you have

• Seminar discussion – how do readings relate to lecture material? to other readings?
Early Chalcolithic in Mesopotamia: the Ubaid period

Topic 1. Ubaid Period: cultural-historical overview
History of research

• Tell al-’Ubaid: excavated just after WW I by H. Hall & C.L. Woolley (1919)
  – initially designated distinctive pottery style: black-on-buff painted (the defining characteristic because found in all contexts called Ubaid)
  – soon thereafter similar pottery found at Ur
  – Ubaid as designation for a time period came into use ca. 1930
  – along with it the notion of an Ubaid ‘culture’, implying also a ‘people’

• Eridu: excavated around WW II by S. Lloyd & F. Safar
  – sequence of temples, Ubaid cemetery, ‘Hut sounding’

• Southern Mesopotamia assumed to be the core area
  – question became how, when, where and why did Ubaid ‘culture’ ‘spread’
  – to northern Mesopotamia (Gawra), to the east (Susa), to the Arabian shores of the Persian Gulf (work in the 1970s)
History of research: Chronology

- Oates’ chronology (1960): based on Eridu in southern Mesopotamia
  - Ubaid 1: Eridu
  - Ubaid 2: Hajji Mohammad
  - Ubaid 3: Early Ubaid
  - Ubaid 4: Late Ubaid

- Chronology subsequently extended:
  - Ubaid 0: Oueili (Samarran)
  - Ubaid 5: Terminal Ubaid

- Calendrical dates – problematic
  - southern Mesopotamia Ubaid 0 – 5: c. 6500 – 4200/4100 BCE
    - Ubaid 1 begins c. 5750 BCE
  - elsewhere Ubaid designates a shorter period of time:
    - in northern Mesopotamia, adoption of Ubaid features in Ubaid 2 or 3 (c. 5300-4300 BCE)
      - replaces Halaf
      - Arabian shores of Gulf – Ubaid 2-3, some Ubaid 4

- i.e. assumption of ceramic continuity in south; break and introduction of new (Ubaid) pottery in north and along western shores of Persian Gulf
Environmental issues

• From 7\textsuperscript{th}-4\textsuperscript{th} mill. BCE moister climate than today
  – some indications of summer monsoons in 5\textsuperscript{th} mill.

• Recent work by Jennifer Pournelle using satellite imagery
  – marine transgression in 5\textsuperscript{th} millennium BCE into southern alluvial lowlands
  – villages in this region in Ubaid times were concentrated on levees and ‘turtlebacks’ bordering marshes
  – dry land was relatively limited
  – Pournelle concludes that Ubaid villagers in southernmost Mesopotamia emphasized exploitation of riverine and marsh resources: reeds, fish, tubers, birds, pig, etc.
Incursion of Gulf waters into southern Mesopotamia

Southern Iraqi marshes in the 1980s
Examples of sites on “turtlebacks”

Uruk survey area: Sites occupied during the Ubaid 4–Early Uruk periods. Legend indicates earliest settlement period (Pournelle 2003: Fig. 8)

Pournelle 2007: Fig. 18
Characteristic Ubaid features

- **Pottery**
  - black-on-buff painted ware
  - high-fired
  - decoration tends to become simpler over time
  - use of tournette in later Ubaid
  - shapes: deep bowls, shallow bowls, deep basins, squat and globular jars
earlier Ubaid pottery

later Ubaid pottery

Roaf 1989; Safar et al. 1981; Wright 1981
Exceptions

Late Ubaid pottery from the Eridu temple and the Susa Necropole

Characteristic Ubaid features

- Tripartite mudbrick architecture
  - long, often T-shaped central halls
  - freestanding

- Temples
  - plans similar to houses
  - but with niched and buttressed facades
  - altars and ‘offering tables’
  - corners oriented to cardinal directions
  - sometimes built on platforms
  - often not much bigger than houses

Roaf 1989; Pollock 1999
Eridu temple sequence

Eridu Temple XVI

Gawra L. XIII

Safar et al. 1981; Roaf 1991
Characteristic Ubaid features

**Tools**
- ‘bent clay nails’ or clay mullers
- weights: for nets, looms
- hoes
- clay sickles (also later)

Lloyd 1978; Wright 1981; Coqueugniot 1996; Anderson & Formenti 1996;
Characteristic Ubaid features

- Figurines
  - conical heads, coffee-bean eyes
- Labrets and flanged disks
- Seals and sealings – predominantly in northern Mesopotamia (Gawra, Kosak Shomali, Değirmentepe) and southwestern Iran (Susiana)
- Cemetery burial

Other Ubaid features

• Copper metallurgy and copper objects
  – principally in northern Mesopotamia
  – smelting installations common at Değirmentepe
  – copper tools at Gawra, as early as L. XVII

• Exchange goods
  – lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian at Gawra
  – bitumen from Hit at Kosak Shamali
  – Mesopotamian pottery along Arabian shores of Gulf

• Boats for transportation

Safar et al. 1981; Carter & Crawford 2010