

NEWCOMERS AND AUTOCHTHONS. PRELIMINARY REPORT ON 2013 ACTIVITIES IN THE KURDISTAN AUTONOMOUS REGION, IRAQ

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Abstract: The aim of the project “Newcomers and autochthons” is a detailed analysis of the archaeological remains dated to the Late Chalcolithic and Ninevite 5 periods found during the survey conducted in the Upper Greater Zab area. The article presents a preliminary report on the field activities in the fall of 2013.

Keywords: Late Chalcolithic period, Late Uruk period, Uruk expansion, Kurdistan Autonomous Region, archaeological survey

The intensification of archaeological research in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region of Iraq in the past few years has been substantial. Numerous survey projects have been undertaken in addition to excavation research. The UGZAR (Upper Greater Zab Archaeological Reconnaissance) project directed by Dr. Rafał Koliński (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań) started in the upper part of the Greater Zab valley in the fall of 2012 [*Fig. 1*].¹ The “Newcomers and autochthons” project supported by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology is kindly hosted within the limits of the UGZAR zone.

One of the main aims of the project is detailed documentation and thorough analysis of remains belonging to the Late Chalcolithic 3–5 period. The widely debated phenomenon of the so-called Uruk expansion took place starting with the Early Middle Uruk period about 3700 BC and continuing until about 3100 BC (Algaze 2008; Butterlin 2003; Rothman 2001; 2004: 93; Sundsdal 2011; all with further bibliography). As a result of this process many components of the southern Mesopotamian material culture (like pottery, seals and seal impressions, architectural layout, clay wall cones etc.)

¹ The survey area abuts on the south with the area of the Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey (EPAS) directed by Dr. Jason Ur (Harvard University); immediately to the northwest is the Land of Niniveh Regional Project (LoNRP) led by Dr. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi (University of Udine).

spread to regions far outside primary Uruk culture territory. The picture emerging from northern Mesopotamia in consequence of these developments is rather complicated: we are dealing with sites representing purely southern Uruk culture, southern enclaves in local settlements, sites with mixed features, as well as settlements with local, indigenous northern

culture. The “Uruk expansion” episode is reasonably well investigated as far as the western part of northern Mesopotamia is concerned (for a recent brief summary, see Oates 2013; Sürenhagen 2013), but the state of our knowledge relating to the area east of the upper Tigris River, which is still rather poorly investigated, is definitely meager and inadequate (Rothman

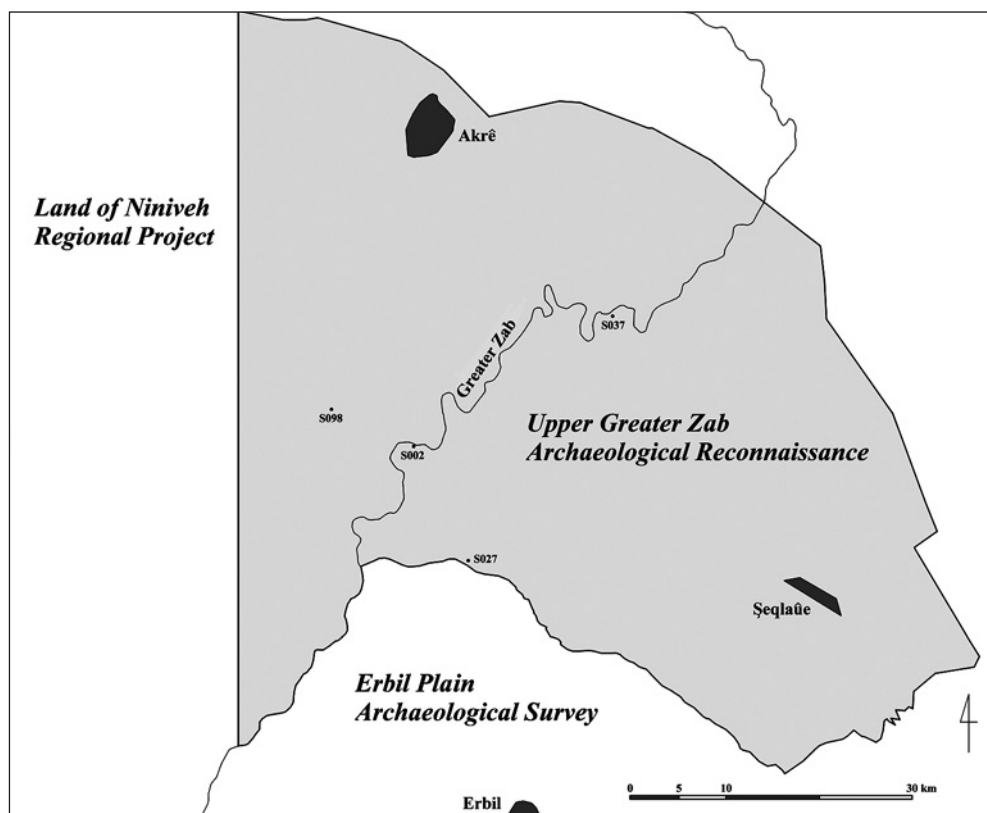


Fig. 1. Map of the UGZAR project area
(Drawing D. Ławecka, based on the map by X. Kolińska)

Team

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2004: 78, Fig. 1; Sundsdal 2011: 171–173, 179, Figs 5–7, 10).

Thanks to surveys conducted in the past the Uruk settlement pattern in southern Mesopotamia is moderately well documented (e.g., Adams 1981; Adams and Nissen 1972), but the region north of the Diyala River valley is largely unknown and even the northern limits of dense and homogeneous Uruk settlement remain unclear.

The area will be studied in detail once the entire region has been investigated. The present report concentrates instead on a few sites that illustrate the heterogeneity of material culture during the Late Chalcolithic 3–5 period in the Upper Greater Zab area.

Limited field activity conducted in 2012 in the southern part of the UGZAR project area revealed three sites (out of 37 documented) with pottery dated to the Late Chalcolithic period. All of them were situated on the waterside, two on the left bank of the Upper Zab River (S002 in sector J3 and S037 in sector F8), while the third one (S027, sector J5) was located on the right side of a large seasonal stream Bastore Çai.²

A small flat site, S002 covered about 0.5 ha in area and was located on the left bank of the Upper Zab River, close to its confluence with Bastore Çai. The site is under cultivation and part of it was apparently undercut and destroyed by the river [Fig. 2]. Preliminary examination of

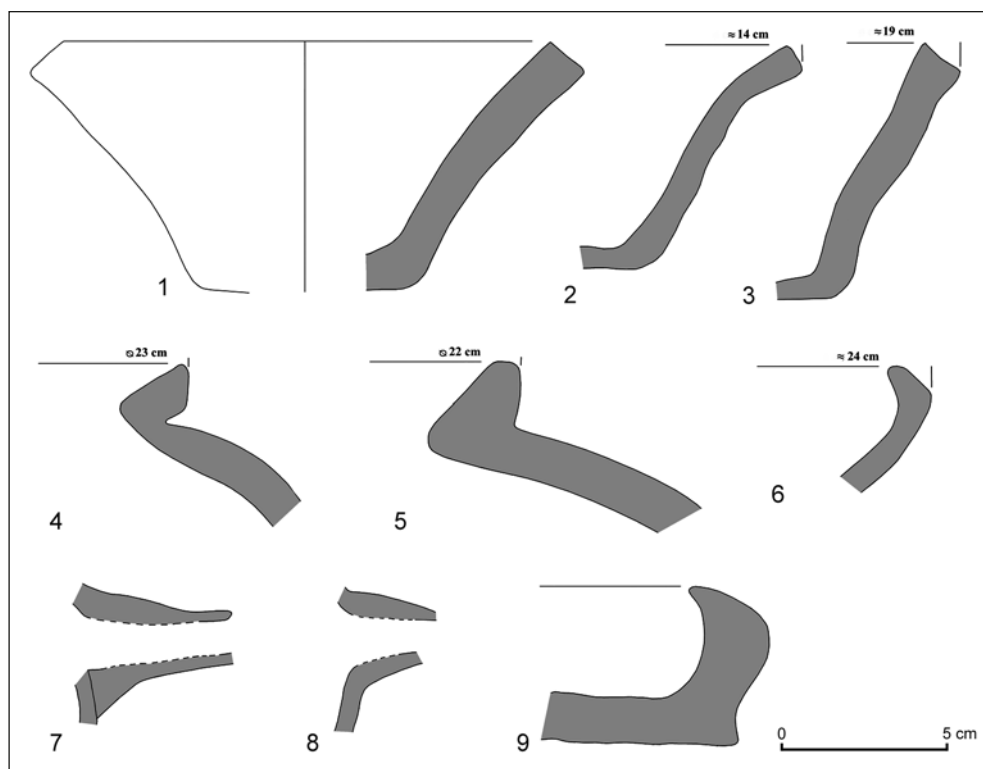


Fig. 2. Northern part of site S002 and a cliff area damaged by the river (Photo D. Ławecka)

² Detailed settlement distribution maps and site catalogues can be found on the project website archeo.amu.edu.pl/ugzar, and on <http://amu.academia.edu/RafalKolinski>. See also preliminary reports (Koliński 2012; 2013) posted on Academia.edu.

the pottery fallen from the section demonstrated it to be a single-period site yielding a large quantity of Late Chalcolithic 3–5 ceramics from the surface.³ A small quantity of local, northern pottery was found, but on the whole S002 yielded mainly southern Uruk specimens, among them several dozens of bevelled rim bowls [e.g., *Fig. 3:1–3*], as well as other fragments

apparently from a southern repertoire [e.g., *Fig. 3:4–9*]. Intriguing, distinctively southern specimens include a clay sickle blade [*Fig. 4*] (see Benco 1992), and two typical clay wall cones [*Fig. 5*]. Although the character of the site cannot be determined without regular excavations, this particular set of southern Mesopotamian items is extremely interesting, testifying



*Fig. 3. Selection of southern Uruk pottery from site S002
(Drawing D. Ławecka)*

³ The preliminary dating of the pottery presented in this article was based mainly on an unpublished field catalogue prepared by Jason Ur (7th edition, 2013), which includes material from numerous survey projects: Iraqi North Jazira Project, Tell Beydar Survey 1997–1998, Tell Hamoukar Survey 1999–2001, Tell Brak Survey 2002–2005, Hirbemerdon Tepe Survey 2007–2011 and Assyrian Landscapes Research Group 2012–2013 (Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey <EPAS>, Land of Nineveh Regional Project <LoNRP>, Upper Greater Zab Archaeological Reconnaissance <UGZAR>). For parallels to *Fig. 3:9*, which is not included in the catalogue, see Pollock 1987: 134, *Fig. 7:c*; 1990: 93, *Fig. 5i*; van Driel 2002: 200, *Fig. 5*, JA 1268.

to at least intense influence or strong ties with southern Uruk material culture.

The second site, S037, is a small multi-period tell with well represented Late Chalcolithic pottery. It yielded both southern and northern sherds, but the pottery still awaits detailed documentation.

The third Late Chalcolithic 3–5 site identified (S027), was found further upstream on the Bastore Çai. It was a flat settlement, covering approximately 1 ha, and was damaged by a huge pit that enabled an examination of the sections. It proved to be a single-period settlement like S002. Although the collected pottery

assemblage was not purely southern, again bevelled rim bowls were in abundance.

The situation in the northern part of the area (Dohuk province), where the project concentrated activities in 2013, appeared to be quite different. Late Chalcolithic sites, rare in the mountain valleys and on the rolling plain, were in abundance in the alluvial plain (Koliński 2013: 11, Table 5). A preliminary look indicated that of the



Fig. 4. Clay sickle, site S002
(Photo M. Szablowski, ©UGZAR project)



Fig. 5. Clay wall cones, site S002
(Photo M. Szablowski, ©UGZAR project)

56 fully documented sites 13 (including traces of settlements represented by modest assemblages of sherds in five instances) yielded Late Chalcolithic material. Southern Uruk pottery was extremely rare,

being found in small quantities (usually solitary sherds) on four sites. Indigenous Late Chalcolithic 3–5 material predominated (at least on five sites), and there were no single-period sites with abundant

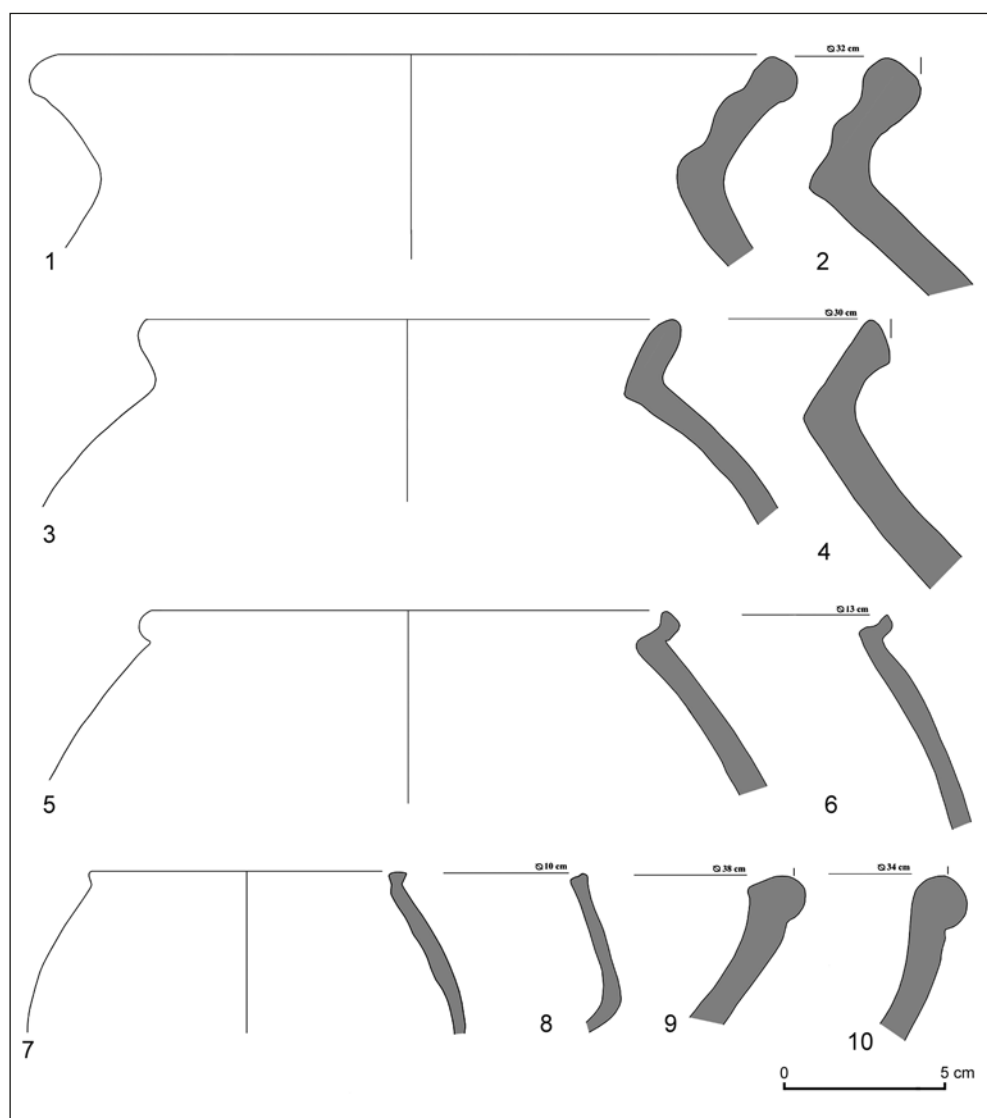


Fig. 6. Sample of indigenous northern Late Chalcolithic 3–5 pottery from site S098
(Drawing L. Kachraman Walika)

southern Uruk pottery comparable to S002 or S027. Moreover, in a few cases sites yielded both Late Chalcolithic 1–2 and 3–5 material, suggesting a well-marked continuity between these two periods.

A good exemplification of this discrepancy was provided by S098 (sector G2), a settlement occupied in the Late Chalcolithic period. Since the site was heavily damaged by recent pits and cuts, the material collected was abundant, giving a fairly sound base for conclusions. Although the site was settled already in the earlier part of the Late Chalcolithic period, sherds contemporary with “Uruk expansion” predominated [Fig. 6]. It seems to represent indigenous northern material culture.

Conclusions will be possible once the results of the surveys in the region are completed and published. For the time being a general preliminary observation may be offered. In its first short season in 2012, the Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey produced relatively abundant southern Uruk pottery, coming from eight sites in the Shemamok and Baqrta regions (Ur et al. 2013: 96, Fig. 4, 110, Fig. 15; no fur-

ther details given). According to Jason Ur, head of the EPAS project, the number of sites with southern Uruk pottery recorded during the 2013 season had doubled (Ur 2013). However, the situation in the area of the Land of Niniveh Regional Project, situated to the northwest of the UGZAR area, appears to be entirely different. Although Late Chalcolithic settlements are numerous (about 60 sites), southern Uruk pottery is extremely rare: altogether only one fragment of bevelled rim bowl, as well as one sherd and one vessel of another type have been found to date (Iamoni 2013). Further investigations in the UGZAR area should bring answers to the question, whether we are dealing here with the northern limits of southern Uruk culture impact on the local pottery tradition.

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