

EMULATION AS A STRATEGY OF URKESH POTTERS AND ITS LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

Abstract. The purpose of this article is the examination of the ceramics from Urkesh Phase 4 (dated to ca 2100–1900 B.C.) from the point of view of a fundamental aspect of the ceramic production in this time period, emulation and experimentation. This research leads to broader conclusions regarding the development of painted pottery first within the later part of Phase 4 and then continuing to emerge as the most important type of ceramic decoration throughout much of the second millennium. In other words I am reconstructing a situation within which the reemergence of painted ceramic decoration began in Phase 4b with an emulation of ceramics produced by ancient potters. This emulation conditioned the sensitivity of local potters and set the stage for them to take up the idea of painted ceramic decoration when it was reintroduced (Oguchi, 2001. P. 71–87).¹

Keywords: Urkesh; Halaf ceramics; Yarim Tepe; community of practice; emulation processes; ethnic identity; Khabur painted ceramics.

1 Early painted ceramics in the Khabur Region* In the sixth millennium the Khabur region was a focus of settlement connected with the Halaf culture as part of a larger settlement zone in the Syro-Iraqi Jezireh with more than forty sites identified (Akkermans, Schwartz, 2003. P. 118). From the site of Mozan/Urkesh we have discovered Halaf sherds on the surface and scattered in later contexts (Buccellati, Kelly-Buccellati, 1988. Fig. 20:1–3, p. 45). In the near neighborhood of Tell Mozan/Urkesh several sites have a significant amount of Halaf painted pottery on the surface. Well known Halaf sites in the area include the type site of Tell Halaf, Chagar Bazar, and Umm Qseir. It is in this period that we find not only mass produced pottery but see that much of that pottery was painted in elaborate geometric designs with fewer examples of

naturalistic designs. Early investigations of the widespread production and use of this type of ceramics were conducted by Merpert and Munchaev (Merpert, Munchaev, 1987. P. 1–37; Merpert, Munchaev, 1993. P. 129–162). More recently Munchaev and Amirov have proposed that cultural influences coming from

¹ H. Oguchi, 2001 “The Origins of Khabur Ware: A Tentative Note” *al-Rafidan* XXII, 2001. pp. 71–87 gives a comprehensive and detailed account of the various theories as to the origin of Khabur painted decoration. For a discussion of Khabur ware, its emergence and development, see X. Faivre and C. Nicolle, 2007 “La Jezireh au Bronze moyen et la ceramique du Khabur,” in M. Al-Maqdissi, V. Matoian, and C. Nicolle, eds *Ceramique de L’Age du Bronze en Syrie III L’Euphrate et la region de Jezireh*, pp. 179–229. More recently Rafal Kolinski has reviewed in-depth the various opinions relating to the beginning of Khabur ware, 2014 “20th Century BC in the Khabur Triangle Region and the Advent of the Old Assyrian Trade with Anatolia,” in D. Bonatz, ed. *The Archaeology of Political Spaces: The Upper Mesopotamian Piedmont in the Second Millennium BCE*. Berlin pp. 9–34. The late third-early second millennium material I am considering here pre-dates the Khabur period, and is very prominently present in all of sector A in Tell Mozan/Urkesh. Phase 4 as used in the text refers to the AAC sequence; it corresponds to phase 5 of the overall Mozan sequence MZA, see urkesh.org/MZ-mainframe for details.

*Much of our knowledge of the Khabur region and the Iraqi Jezireh during the prehistoric periods is based on the seminal work of Rauf M. Munchaev. It was always a privilege to be able to discuss with him common archaeological problems as his experience and insights were deep and willingly shared. Now it is with sincere admiration for the man and his scientific work that I offer this article on the Urkesh potters and their attachment to their long tradition.

the Transcaucasian area influenced the development of the Halaf culture in Syro-Mesopotamia (Мунчаев, Амиров, 2009. С. 45). Much newly excavated material from the Caucasus is leading to new conclusions about the relationships of this area to Syro-Mesopotamia (Lyonnet 2007, 2012).

The widespread adoption of the Halaf painted pottery must have had a deep impact on the populations using these vessels as in mid sixth millennium sites about 75% of the ceramics were painted. The attraction of these vessels came from the fact that they were unique, usually made in a fine, mineral tempered fabric, highly fired, thin walled and included a large number of complex shape types. The red or black painted design types were spread over the entire vessel in most cases and included simple parallel bands, cross-hatching, triangles, zigzags. Both the positive and negative space was considered in the designs as in most cases the unpainted portion of the design is as prominent as the painted part. The widespread use of this pottery must express a pride in both the craft producers and their customers, reflecting solidarity among potters, be they domestic producers making ceramics for themselves or, as we see in the later part of the Halaf period, potters who may have been full-time producers. The consumers too must have appreciated the vessels since there was such a widespread distribution in all types contexts including domestic and what we can reconstruct as more public buildings. The basic continuity of this craft tradition must have imbued the society with a sense of cohesion with their past and pride in their cultural achievements.

The strength of this painted ceramic tradition diminished during the following periods. A waning interest in painted designs began in the Ubaid period when we see bold geometric designs, usually decorating bowls, gradually being replaced by undecorated vessels. Subsequently the percentage of painted pottery is much less in the early Ninevite 5 period and is replaced eventually in the later part of the period by incised decoration. In the following Early Dynastic periods some painting persisted in a few areas (for example, the so-called Scarlet ware in southern Mesopotamia and the related painted stands in Syro-Mesopotamia (Kelly-Buccellati in Milano, 1991. Fig. 8). The pattern we see here is that the influence of a craft tradition in the material culture emphasizing ceramics decorated with painted designs gradually disappeared as it was being replaced by other stronger variables in the culture.

2. Early Phase 4 Emulation Processes ²

One of the most striking aspects of Phase 4 ceramics in all areas that we have excavated in Mozan/Urkesh is the desire on the part of Urkesh potters to imitate ceramics from an earlier stage of the Urkesh “community of practice” as seen by them through the ancient ceramics distributed throughout the site. They would have had the opportunity to observe these earlier ceramics not only on the surface of the tell but also when digging on the site within the normal course of their lives, e. g., wells, pits for storage, to obtain mud for making mud bricks etc. The Urkesh potters could imitate either earlier wares or earlier types of decoration (Kelly-Buccellati, 2012. P. 203–223). The ware most imitated is Metallic ware and this is also imitated in Phase 3 (ca 2200 B.C.) although the imitation of this ware increased in Phase 4 (Fig. 1). This is also the case for imitations of Bi-Color ware³ again starting in Phase 3 but becoming more prominent statistically in Phase 4 (Fig. 2) (Kelly-Buccellati, 2012. P. 214–17). It is important to note that in all of these cases there is not an attempt to imitate the fabric, but to reproduce the surface texture and coloration of the earlier ceramics: it is, as it were, a shortcut to obtain a semblance of the ancient but without using all the technical components of the process that had made it possible.

Also striking are the instances of an emulation of the decoration techniques and designs of past generations of the same community of practice. At first this applies only to incised decoration. While we have a few examples of these imitations in late Phase 3, in Phase 4a (ca 2100 B.C.) these emulations become more frequent in the form of incised designs just below the rim of bowls or on the upper body of jars (Fig. 3) (Kelly-Buccellati, 2003. Abb. 16:5). If we examine the sections of the Phase 4 imitations we can see that the potters were interested in reproducing the designs but not the fabrics and not the shapes. Often the impulse for these imitations of incised decoration techniques and designs came from the finer incised patterns produced on early Ninevite 5 small vessels and were translated onto small vessels also in Phase 4a. We have as well instances of the larger and heavier incised designs of late Ninevite 5 being imitated as incised decorations of larger vessels in Phase 4a⁴. In another example the incisions are placed in groups on top of a wide rim, a rim type that is characteristic for Phase 4 but not earlier (Fig. 4). In none of these cases did the potter intend to reproduce the ware recipes.

² See: Archaeology..., 2012; Rice, 1987. P. 455–456.

³ Also called by the awkward name Dark Rim Orange Bowls.

⁴ In the case of the Phase 4 example the imitated pattern is placed on the neck.

3. Late Phase 4 Emulation Processes

In the latter part of Phase 4 we see the beginning of a different interest on the part of local potters because at this point in time they began to use painting as a type of decoration. This was more difficult technically since the traditional recipes for the production of paint seem to have been lost. Therefore in Phase 4b potters began to experiment with the application of painted designs with a bitumen based paint. The use of bitumen for a variety of purposes had in fact not been lost as evidenced by its continuous employment as a waterproofing substance and as a mastic not only on pottery but occasionally on bricks and clay objects. Bitumen based paint never was very popular in this period as a decorative technique for ceramics in Urkesh and was a transitional stage between experimenting with incised decoration and the later painted designs based on different paint recipes and for the most part different decorative designs (see below). Bitumen is difficult to use for ceramic painted designs and because of this was limited in late Phase 4 even though bitumen is locally available in the Mozan area. One indication of the difficulty of the application of this paint is shown by the poor quality of the paint application with edges uneven and blurred, dots painted in an almost haphazard manner (Fig. 5). However, bitumen paint as a technique was widespread geographically as seen through its utilization in Terqa and even as far south as Uruk (Kelly-Buccellati, Shelby, 1977. P. 1–56; Kelly-Buccellati, Shelby, 2007. P. 120–151). In the case of Terqa we now know from the Late Old Babylonian tablets from Tell Taban that the Khana kingdom included part at least of the Khabur region. Because of this interest in the Khabur region, earlier connections between Terqa and the Khabur should not come as a surprise (Shibata, Yamada, 2009. P. 87–109).⁵

In the Khabur period in Urkesh new decorative forms consonant with older traditions emerged from this interest. We can see this in a number of simple but telling examples. For instance some painted Khabur period designs emulate incised designs from Phase 4a. These include the Phase 4a running incised triangles on the shoulder of jars (Kelly-Buccellati, 2012. Fig 10.4 b,c) which subsequently can be seen painted on the shoulders of Khabur jars, but now combined with a series of wide horizontal bands. Groups of incised combed lines on the top of a wide rim in Phase 4a (see Fig. 5) became transformed in Phase 5 (the Khabur period) into discrete groups of parallel lines on the tops of bowl rims (Fig. 6). In the bitumen painted vessels jars often have solidly

painted necks often continued on the rim; this type of jar decoration survived into the Khabur period. More specifically in Phase 4b we see that large dots can be placed near the base of jar necks. Dots can also be placed on Khabur vessels although this is not a popular type of decoration (Fig. 7); it should be remembered that small dots in various designs were important in the Halaf period.

In conclusion we can see that in a period of transition the reaffirmation of the past had profound long term consequences for the continuity of the craft as painting was reintroduced in late Phase 4, changed character in Phase 5 and continued over a wide area through the Mittani period. The evidence for this emulation strategy also shows us another characteristic of the Urkesh potters community of practice. They appreciated their *ownership* of the technical knowledge base of long standing and could utilize its depth to expand their own craft products.

4. The cultural setting

The impetus to take up traditional practices and to expand the contemporary knowledge base through observation and experimentation comes probably from many sources. I will mention two in particular.

The community of practice. – The knowledge transfer from a long-ago portion of the community of practice to contemporary potters could only come from a new interest in observation and analysis of previous decorative techniques. Clearly the Phase 4 potters were participating in a long standing community of practice that had started in the early Ninevite 5 period, if not before. A community of practice may be defined as a group of craft producers, with no organizational structure, but held together horizontally across space and vertically across time by shared technical and stylistic expertise. We know that Urkesh potters belonged to such a community because we see only gradual changes through time in the ceramic recipes and firing techniques employed by the Urkesh potters⁶. Also we can see from the seal iconography of Phase 3 (ca 2200 B.C.) that ceramics are a very important element in the seal designs that even contained a scene of a potter's workshop on a seal belonging to king Tupkish (Kelly-Buccellati, 1998. P. 35–50) (Fig. 8). The affirmation of the importance of the potter's production (perhaps even reflecting a higher social status of some craft producers) could have been

⁵ I would like to thank Alexander Ahrens for the references to these very important texts from Tell Taban.

⁶ The examples in Fig 8 from temple BA date to Phase 1 ca 2400 B.C. and from Phase 5 to ca 1800 B.C. We have presently a large study on the changes in potters' recipes for clay and inclusions a short description of which can be found in Frahm, Nikolaidou, Kelly-Buccellati, 2008. Pp 8–12.

an impulse for later potters to examine and then emulate earlier production techniques. While Phase 4 is a time of transition in the Khabur region, in Urkesh the city continued to be occupied and the city retained a sustained interest in those ritual practices so important in earlier periods as evidenced, for instance, by an uninterrupted use of the *ābi*.⁷ The emulation of earlier practices signifies an interest in and appreciation for the work of ancient members of the same community; their work still existed in the city in the form of their products easily on view anywhere on the site. It is not a community of practice struggling once more for expression through emulation of its “betters” from the past. What we see here are potters willing to look at the past and incorporate it into the present. In my opinion, it is this new sensitivity for ancient customs that led to a renewed interest in past painted traditions and resulted in the reemergence of painted designs in the Khabur period. In other words the painting of ceramics was reinvented because of a renewed connection with the past on the part of Phase 4 potters. This revitalization of a craft tradition is the direct result of emulation processes that began with appreciation and was achieved through experimentation. It is for this reason that I speak of emulation rather than imitation: I do not see this phenomenon as one of a casual lifting of motifs from fossils found in the ground, but as a confrontation with the makers of the earlier products, potters to potters, as it were, across the ages.

Awareness of ethnic identity. – Emulation processes are not restricted in Urkesh to potters. We see this also in andirons and their decoration. For instance a large decorated andiron was found in situ in a Khabur period context (Kelly-Buccellati, 2004. P. 67–89) (Fig. 9). After this discovery more decorated andirons have been excavated, but none as well preserved. In addition we have excavated in a Phase 4 context a small, portable andiron with a similar type of decoration (Fig. 10). While por-

table decorated andirons had been found previously at the site, this example is the only one with a well dated context. One of the possible reasons for the continued production in Urkesh of both permanent and portable andirons with decorations similar to those found in the Early Trans-Caucasian culture to the north could be that emulation strategies are being employed in a period of transition to link the Hurrian population of Urkesh with their past as part of a strengthening and consolidation effort to withstand the social and economic changes sweeping the region. Foregrounding traditions connected with a shared past would generate benefits of social cohesion and clarity of ethnic identification. The production and use of decorated andirons I would see as a strategy through which craft traditions are employed to reinforce social and cultural identity. In this light the reemergence of painted ceramics in late Phase 4 made the reception of painted decoration techniques easier in the following Khabur period when the paint recipes had been reinvented with a paint that was much easier to employ. In this reconstruction the community of practice would have viewed ceramics with a painted decoration as a continuity with ancient craft traditions.

It is in this double sense that we can speak of “ownership of knowledge”. On the one hand the potters *qua* craftsmen develop a bond that associates them not only with each other at a given point in time, but also with their forebears whose products they come to appreciate through observation: they “own” the knowledge because they, and they alone, can put it into practice, precisely as a community of practice. On the other hand the potters, by leaning back onto the past (even without a clear awareness of how remote this might have been), come to affirm a uniqueness of style that sets them apart *qua* members of a larger social group: they “own” the knowledge because it defines them within the framework of larger historical categories.

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⁷ The *ābi* ceramics are published in Kelly-Buccellati 2003. Abb. 16–18.

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М. Келли-Буччелати

ИМИТАЦИЯ КАК СТРАТЕГИЯ ГОНЧАРОВ УРКЕША И ЕЕ ДОЛГОВРЕМЕННЫЕ СЛЕДСТВИЯ

Резюме. Статья посвящена изучению керамики Телля Мюзан (Уркеш) фазы 4 (примерно 2100–1900 до н.э.) с точки зрения важнейшего аспекта ее производства в этот период – имитации и экспериментирования. Проведенное исследование позволяет дополнить выводы о развитии расписной керамики с конца фазы 4 и далее в последующий период, когда на протяжении практически всего II тыс. до н.э. расписная керамика становится самым распространенным типом посуды. Автор статьи реконструирует ситуацию, когда на этапе фазы 4b расписная керамика вновь становится популярной, и гончары начинают имитировать керамические изделия древних мастеров. Такая имитация показывает уровень адаптации традиции керамической росписи после ее повторного появления на Телле Мюзан.

Ключевые слова: Уркеш; халафская керамика; Ярм-Тепе; профессиональное сообщество; процессы имитации; этническая идентичность; хабурская расписная керамика.



Fig. 1. Comparison between Metallic ware (left) and Imitation Metallic ware (right)

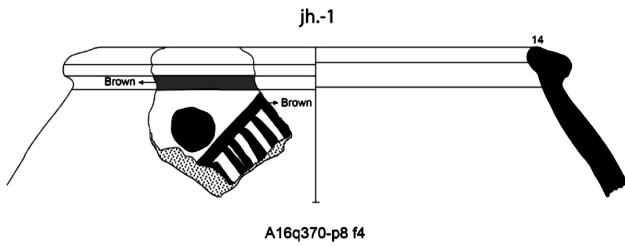
Fig. 2. Comparison between Bi-color ware (above) and Imitation Bi-color ware (below)

Fig. 3. Ninevite 5 incised decoration above and Phase 4 jar with incised decoration on shoulder

Fig. 4. Incised decoration on a Phase 4a rim



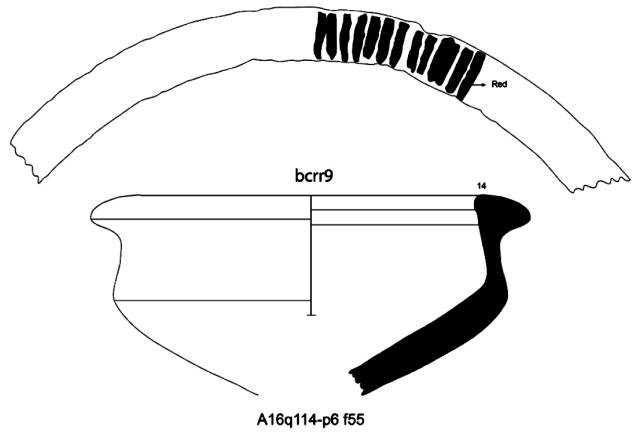
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Fig. 5. Phase 4b bitumen painted ceramics

Fig. 6. Painted lines on top of a Phase 5 (Khabur period) rim

Fig. 7. Phase 5 Khabur painted dot design

Fig. 8. A potter's workshop on a seal of the Urkesh king, Tupkish

Fig. 9. Permanently installed Phase 5 (Khabur period) andiron with decoration

Fig. 10. Portable decorated andiron from a Phase 4 context

РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
ИНСТИТУТ АРХЕОЛОГИИ



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ON THE DAWN OF THE BRONZE AGE

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РОССИЙСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК
ИНСТИТУТ АРХЕОЛОГИИ

ГОРЫ КАВКАЗА И МЕСОПОТАМСКАЯ СТЕПЬ НА ЗАРЕ БРОНЗОВОГО ВЕКА

Сборник к 90-летию Р. М. Мунчаева



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Сборник статей «Горы Кавказа и Месопотамская степь на заре бронзового века» посвящен юбилею выдающегося российского археолога, лауреата Государственной премии РФ, члена-корреспондента РАН, доктора исторических наук, профессора Рауфа Магомедовича Мунчаева. Весомый вклад Рауфа Магомедовича в изучении эпохи поздней первобытности Кавказа и Переднего Востока признан профессиональным сообществом археологов во всем мире. Данный сборник отражает круг научных интересов юбиляра и охватывает временной интервал от эпохи неолита до эпохи ранней бронзы в широком поясе от степей Предкавказья до Южной Месопотамии.

Сборник предназначен для научных сотрудников, студентов-археологов и всех, кто интересуется археологией.

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ПРЕДИСЛОВИЕ

23 сентября 2018 г. Рауф Магомедович Мунчаев отметил свой 90-летний юбилей. Такая неординарная веха жизненного пути важна для каждого человека независимо от его профессиональных занятий, но для ученого, обладающего высокой международной репутацией, она особо весома. Для археологического сообщества имя Рауфа Магомедовича Мунчаева прочно связано с важными достижениями археологии в изучении поздней первобытности (неолит и бронзовый век) Западной Евразии – от Кавказа до Ближнего Востока. Многолетние полевые исследования, проведенные экспедицией Института археологии РАН под его руководством, стали эталоном исследований первобытной археологии Месопотамии.

Воздавая должное заслугам Рауфа Магомедовича в исследовании первобытных древностей Кавказа и Месопотамии, коллеги, по академической традиции, подготовили сборник статей, посвященных проблемам, изучением которых на протяжении всей своей профессиональной деятельности занимается юбиляр.

Понятно, что название сборника «Горы Кавказа и Месопотамская степь на заре бронзового века» представляет собой парафраз одной из наиболее известных книг Р.М. Мунчаева, посвященной эпохе палеометалла Кавказа, и опубликованной в 1975 г. Соответственно название этого сборника определяет, как географические, так и хронологические рамки представленных в нем статей, которые близки научным интересам юбиляра и тематически охватывают проблематику от докерамического неолита до рубежа ранней-средней бронзы на территории от Предкавказья до Южной Месопотамии. Издание дополняют воспоминания и разделы, посвященные истории науки.

В некоторых случаях статьи публикуются в авторской редакции.

В подготовке этого сборника приняли участие коллеги, друзья и ученики Р.М. Мунчаева. Поскольку авторитет Рауфа Магомедовича является общепризнанным как у нас в стране, так и за ее границами, то и сборник получился по-настоящему международным. Помимо отечественных исследователей в нем участвовали коллеги из государств Южного Кавказа, Европы и Америки. Мы выражаем глубокую благодарность всем, кто работал над этой книгой.

Редакционная коллегия

INTRODUCTION

On September 23rd 2018 Rauf Munchaev celebrated his 90th birthday. Such a date in life would be considered unique for any person, regardless of his or her profession. But for a scholar with an impeccable international reputation it is of special importance. For the archaeological community Rauf Munchaev's name is bound to the most important discoveries of the Late Prehistoric Periods (the Neolithic and the Bronze Age) of Western Eurasia – from the Caucasus to the Middle East. Numerous field research, conducted under his supervision by the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, became the touchstones of prehistoric archaeology in Mesopotamia.

Paying homage to Rauf Munchaev's achievements in the study of prehistoric antiquities of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, his colleagues – in accordance with the academic tradition – prepared a collection of articles on the subject, to which the acclaimed anniversary celebrant dedicated his professional life. To a scholar it will be obvious that the miscellanea's title *The Caucasus Mountains and the Mesopotamian Steppe on the Dawn of the Bronze Age* is a paraphrase of one of R. Munchaev's best-known books, dedicated to the Paleo-metal Era of the Caucasus and published in 1975.

Accordingly, the title of the given publication firmly establishes the geographic and chronological boundaries of the research, contained in its articles; all of them are in the frameworks of the celebrant's academic interests and are dedicated to various aspects – from the pre-ceramic Neolithic to the boundaries of the early-middle Bronze Age, in the region between the Ciscaucasia to Southern Mesopotamia. The publication is supplemented by memoirs and sections dedicated to the history of science. Several articles are published with the author's editorials.

Rauf Munchaev's colleagues, friends and students took part in the preparation of this book. Since Rauf Munchaev's name commands respect not only in Russia, but in the entire world, this miscellanea truly became an international project. Besides Russian scholars, it includes the works of our colleagues from the Transcaucasian Countries, Europe and America. We sincerely thank everyone who took part in the work on this book.

Editorial board