

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

Proceedings of the 5th International Congress
on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

**Proceedings of the 5th International
Congress on the Archaeology of
the Ancient Near East**

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La artesanía y el arte en el Oriente Antiguo

4. *Reports on the Results from the Latest Archaeological Seasons*

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Programme - Programa

Settlements, population and landscape on the Upper Euphrates between V and II millennium BC. Results of the Archaeological Survey Project 2003-2005 in the Malatya Plain

Gian Maria Di Nocera, Rome

Abstract

The archaeological survey of the territory of Malatya (eastern Anatolia) is carried out by the Department of Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences of the University of Rome «La Sapienza». Aim is that of identifying, from an archaeological point of view, the changes in the life style and in the social and economic relations in the region, in a period going from the V to the II millennium BC, in connection with the complex events and radical changes that are documented by the excavation of the site of Arslantepe, the land mark of the region. The results obtained until today have evidenced different typologies of site occupation in the Malatya territory. Our intention was to identify the relationship between stability and mobility in terms of the settlement models through the different ways of exploiting the local resources.

Keywords: survey, Upper Euphrates, Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age, Middle Bronze Age.

The feeling of belonging to a territory, like the idea of border or frontier, change in time, with the changing of the social structure, the modes of production and the interaction between communities, that can be either cooperative or hostile. The land «of a community», which will comprehend certain groups but exclude others, is an artificial construction first of all based on social and economic mechanisms and only secondarily on geographical features; it is the setting, this too subject to continuous change, in which man performs his life and experiences his relations. Society though, not only gives shape to the landscape, but it can also suffer its devastating reactions.¹ The modes in which a population is distributed on and occupies a territory is, thus, one of the clues for the understanding of its social and economic structure, its modes of production, and also the contradictions and conflicts that can, at times, weaken the achieved equilibrium.

The Malatya region constitutes an ideal scene for such an investigation² (fig. 1a). The excavation of the mound of Arslantepe, with its uninterrupted sequence from the V millennium BC to the Byzantine period, is a key site in the surrounding landscape. The richness of its pottery assemblages, stratigraphically sure and analysed in regards to their functional variability and spatial distribution within the site, the layout

¹ Wilkinson 2003: 7-10, Zanini 2000: 3-28.

² Frangipane, Di Nocera, Palumbi 2005.

of the settlements of different periods, the complex architecture, and the political and productive systems throughout the ages, all provide a unique opportunity for the most recent prehistory of verifying to what extent and how historical events deduced from the excavation of a single, even though central, place, are reflected on the surrounding territory and which are instead to be referred to peculiarities of the single site. The questions we were trying to answer in investigating the landscape were thus resulting, differently to what is normally the case, from a good knowledge of the events that were going to be studied and from the long and in depth research at the main site. The archaeological survey project of the Malatya province, comprising the whole plain and adjacent piedmont and valley areas, was conceived with this scientific aspiration, that Salvatore Puglisi and Alba Palmieri had already felt and which had inspired their investigations at Gelinciktepe and Fethiye.³

The majority of settlements signalled in the past in this territory, apart from the researches carried out in the 20s by van der Osten and in the 50s by Burney,⁴ result from investigations on the peri-fluvial zone of the Euphrates, the area affected by the growing of the water level following the construction of the Karakaya dam.⁵ Many of the sites discovered during these investigations are today irreparably under water.

The territory immediately south of the Euphrates, which is much vaster than the fluvial area, has been for a long time unknown. This area, from a geological point of view, is characterised by neogenic fluvio-lacustrine deposits, covered locally by conglomerates. Towards the Euphrates, the dominant sediments are plio-quaternary sediments consisting of conglomerates, gravel and sand.⁶ The rich natural drainage system, combined with the over 1800 springs, supplied by a complex hydrogeological system, and the presence of copper and lead, are of significant value for a broad exploitation of the territory.⁷ The goal of our research project has been to identify through archaeology the changes in life styles and in the social and economic dynamics in the region between the V and beginning of II millennium BC, in relation to the complex events and radical changes testified at Arslantepe.

As to what concerns methodology, field work has been carried out with the aid of local maps and of a Soyuz satellite image, on which the routes to be followed were planned, by pointing out areas of possible past occupation on the basis of multiple morphological factors. A consequence of the direct observation of the territory has been, a part from the identification of sites, also the compilation of detailed maps, in which visibility patterns are given: investigated areas with good visibility, covered areas with low visibility, areas that cannot be investigated because of a very thick vegetation or urbanisation. This kind of thematic mapping also has the objective of rationally orienting any future research in this territory. The most significant sites have been mapped with a «differential GPS», producing detailed plans that have aided, apart from the positioning of the archaeological material, the reading of specific morphological characters, by using isohypse every 25cm.

³ Palmieri 1967; Puglisi, Meriggi 1964: 12-18.

⁴ Burney 1958; Russell 1980.

⁵ Yakar, Gürsan Salzmann 1977; Serdaroğlu 1977; Özdoğan 1977; Sevin 1986.

⁶ Palmieri 1978.

⁷ Marcolongo, Palmieri 1983.

The results obtained until now in the survey⁸ and those deducible from the pre-existing data⁹ have evidenced varying settlement typologies in the Malatya territory (tab. 1). Settlements on tells, term with which we identify isolated relieves formed exclusively by an anthropic stratification and which rise above the surrounding plain, are not the dominant character of the territory; there are in fact also sites in flat areas and settlements on specific geomorphological features, amongst which the most abundant are natural hills with gradual slopes and rounded tops, on which a shallow anthropic stratum is still preserved. These sites testify for sporadic or limited in time occupations and are possibly evidence of the presence of mobile communities. Of the same typology, even though with different morphology, could be considered the tabular summits. These are relieves of calcareous-dolomitic and secondarily arenaceous sedimentary strata, with a sub-horizontal attitude, which have undergone a tectonic heaving and successively been isolated by erosion. In general, this kind of relief has steep slopes and the occupation, here too ephemeral, is solely on the hill top. The last category of sites, associated with natural formations, is that defined as complex of hills. This is a group of undulating relieves, at times also with strongly steep slopes. The archaeological site is in general in the sheer zones or on the summit of one of the relieves composing the group. Lastly, there are sites on «glacis», in other words, accordant levels connecting the detrital sediments and the wide valley floor, with very slight slopes and strictly correlated to water sources. In the territory of Malatya, out of 82 prehistoric sites, 33% are tells, but the settlements on natural relieves –tabular summit, natural hill, and complex of hills– are at least 52% (fig. 3*a*). If we compare the distribution of settlements in the different periods, it appears that the V millennium sites of the Early-Middle Chalcolithic are on tells, then on natural relieves and on «glacis» (figs. 1*b*; 3*b*). The Late Chalcolithic occupation follows on the earlier trend (figs. 1*c*; 3*c*). It should be stressed though, that the number of sites identified for both periods is rather small: respectively 12% and 14% of the total. The site of Arslantepe appears to be the only one occupied at the end of the IV millennium, period corresponding to the Late Chalcolithic 5 - the Late Uruk period, according to the South-Mesopotamian terminology. Solely at Muhlisin Tepe, a natural hill approximately 1km north-west of Arslantepe, some ceramic fragments dated to the end of the IV millennium and corresponding to Arslantepe VI-A, amongst which the stem with cut out decoration of a high-stemmed bowl, have been found.

In the immediate vicinities of Arslantepe, where an intensive survey has been carried out, fragments of the typical Arslantepe VI-A mass produced and wheel-made truncated conical bowls with traces of a string-cut at the base have been collected. Notwithstanding the modern high apportionment of the land devoted to horticulture and the recent building activities carried out in a 500m radius around the site of Arslantepe, the results of the intensive survey, that was undertaken in 2005, allow us today to confirm the presence of a settlement at the base of the tell. On the other hand the excavation had, until now, provided rare testimony of

⁸ Di Nocera 2005*a*; 2005*b*.

⁹ Conti Persiani 1993: 387-392.

domestic structures on the tell proper for period VI-A, fact this which reasonably brought to suggest that the village had developed outside the palatial area.

With the first half of the III millennium, during the Early Bronze I-II (fig. 2*a*), there is a radical change in settlement patterns. The number of sites in the area increases and at least 54% of these are found on natural hills, with no real stratified deposits, thus apparently indicating a very short occupation (fig. 3*d*). In this regard, the increase of the number of sites does not correspond to a proper increase in population, but rather to a greater mobility of the groups within the territory; in fact, in most sites of this period and with only rare exceptions, we have mapped very limited extensions of the occupied areas. What is observed is a splitting up of sites, distributed in the central area of the plain and, towards east, along the piedmont.

In the second half of the III millennium (Early Bronze III) there is yet another change (fig. 2*b*). Population tends to move back to the peri-fluvial area, where sites are mostly tells (fig. 3*e*). In the area that could be defined «hinterland», south of the Euphrates, certain sites act as major centres, thus with a more varied situation compared to the Late Chalcolithic, which showed the exclusive and overwhelming presence of Arslantepe. Many of these settlements are tells, occupied for the first time at the beginning of the Early Bronze III, whilst others maintain their predominant role in the landscape. Undoubtedly different compared to the past is the mode of occupation of these sites, with a constant presence of people inside the settlement, which has proper multi-stratified deposits, and a strongly agriculture based economy. The mobile, herding component of the society does not disappear, but it is probably again integrated with the sedentary farming group, bringing to a new widespread and permanent occupation of the territory, in which Arslantepe carries on being the main centre of the plain, but in which there is no evidence of a strong and complex hierarchical organization. Sites with a specific role in mining activities beginning to appear: Ören Tepe and Kurşunlu Mezrası are an example. Along the Kurşunlu Dere, next to the village of Cafana, southwest of Malatya, are lead deposits. These mines have been in use until recently, but the traces of lead extraction in the area date back to the late-Roman and Medieval periods. These two Early Bronze Age III sites are on hill complexes and with a temporary occupation, and, even though there is no direct evidence of an exploitation of the Cafana mines in the III millennium BC, their nearness to the mines, together with the settlement characters, bring to suspect, on the contrary of what is evidenced in the rest of the region, that these sites could have been small mining villages.

In the first quarter of the II millennium the number of sites diminishes and tells (figs. 2*c*; 3*f*), in the Middle Bronze Age, are 59% of the total geomorphological categories. Furthermore, only 34% of settlements are newly founded. These elements attest a continuity of occupation with similar characters to those of the end of the III millennium B.C.

A last observation can be made concerning the general settlement distribution within the Malatya territory. If we consider only the peri-fluvial area (fig. 4*a*), throughout all periods, tells, even though not exclusive, are dominant, whereas in the «hinterland», south of the Euphrates (fig. 4*b*) and of its affluent Tohma Çayı, modes of occupation are much more varied. This distinction could underline a

conscious and voluntary separation of the two areas and a differentiated use of the territory.

The historical events testified by Arslantepe¹⁰ find abundant confirmations in the territorial distribution of settlements proposed until now. The Ubaid period has not been reached yet by the systematic excavation, and is documented only by out of context sherds. In the following Late Chalcolithic (end of the IV millennium BC), though, the site of Arslantepe (period VII) reveals features of an incipient centralised system, South-Mesopotamian in character, that then strengthens itself towards the end of the IV millennium BC (period VI-A). A single centre, Arslantepe, dominates over the Malatya plain at the end of the IV millennium. It is probable that the site, with its organisational qualities, attracted most of the population of the region, not necessarily to live there, but to use it as its economic, political and religious centre.

On the ruins of the palace, after the final collapse of the palatial system, mud and wooden huts, associated with numerous animal pens (period VI-B1, Early Bronze Age I), are installed, testifying that communities with a highly nomadic component, which will, with alternating phases, consolidate in time (period VI-C, Early Bronze II), were occupying the site. The decrease in size of Arslantepe is in line with what happens in the surrounding region after the fall of the palatial system, around 3000 BC. Population is in fact sparsely distributed in the territory and sites are only temporarily occupied, as demonstrated by the fact that many are single phase. The scarcity of archaeological contexts identified in the survey unfortunately does not permit a clear distinction between Early Bronze Age I and II; Arslantepe VI-C (Early Bronze Age II) settlements though appear to prevail.

The settlement distribution undergoes further changes at the end of the III millennium BC, when Arslantepe testifies a gradual increase in size and a more structured town planning. The excavation has furthermore brought to light specific work areas, as those for metallurgists, but it has most importantly evidenced that the site was characterised by an imposing fortification, suggesting some degree of conflict in the territory.¹¹ Population newly concentrates in more stable sites and the so-called single-phase settlements disappear. Various «central sites» are settled and develop in the landscape. Along the Euphrates are sites as Pirot,¹² Köşkerbaba,¹³ İmamoğlu,¹⁴ Cantepe,¹⁵ Süleyman Tepe (Hacılar), whilst in the southern hinterland are, apart from Arslantepe, Fırınçı Höyük,¹⁶ Bire Tepe, Galip Baba Tepe, İçmesu Tepe, and Maltepe. Some of these tells are founded directly on pre-existing hill complexes and their occupation begins with Early Bronze III proper. We thus witness, from half III millennium, the emergence of a new form of power based on small local «lords», when conflict and competition over the territory must have been dominant.

¹⁰ Frangipane (ed.) 2004.

¹¹ Di Nocera 2001: 86-87.

¹² Mellink 1982a; 1983b; 1984; Özdoğan 1977: 55-56; Serdaroğlu 1977: 64-65.

¹³ Özdoğan 1977: 50-51.

¹⁴ Mellink 1982b; 1983a; 1987; 1988; 1990; Özdoğan 1977: 45-46; Uzunoğlu 1985; 1986; 1987; 1988.

¹⁵ Özdoğan 1977: 41-42.

¹⁶ Burney 1958; Russell 1980: 83-84.

The character of the landscape at the beginning of the II millennium appears to be in continuity with the earlier one, even though the number of sites decreases drastically. The Middle Bronze Age site of Arslantepe is defended by a fortification wall running along the margins of the tell, but the stratigraphy has been disrupted by hundreds of pits, thus the architecture is rarely evidenced by whole structures. It is not possible to reconstruct the town plan nor the actual extension of the settlement, but the presence of a large house with a monumental double horse-shoe shaped hearth, the stratigraphy, that evidences no gap with the previous period, and the pottery suggest a strong relation with the Early Bronze Age III tradition.

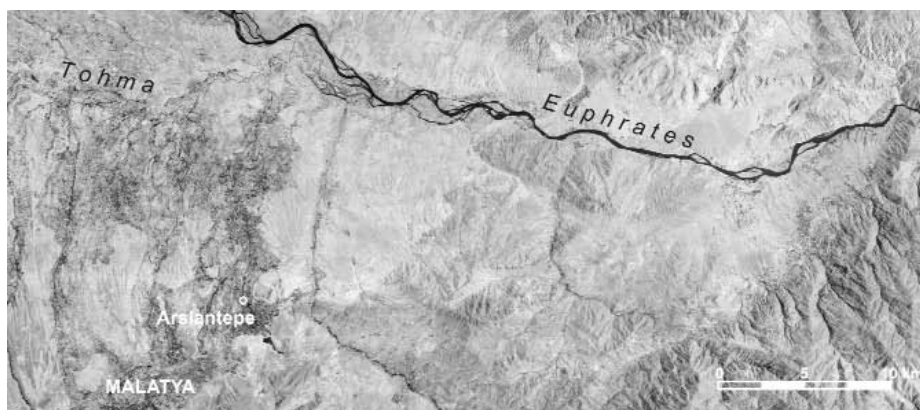
To conclude, the data collected during the survey evidence a strong change between the phases characterised by a unitary territorial structure, probably based on a single pre-eminent centre (Late Chalcolithic), and those in which a crisis of this system causes an occupation of the plain by small, mostly single phase, highland settlements (Early Bronze I-II). The latter would appear to suggest a rather mobile model of occupation and a poor regional integration, evidencing the use of the territory by groups in movement, possibly herders, previously at the margins of the centralised system dominated by Arslantepe, but always present. Such model evidences strong analogies with that observed in exactly the same period in Transcaucasia and on which will be based the new political and territorial character of the second half of the III millennium (Early Bronze III). This phenomenon lasts, with few changes, until the first quarter of the II millennium, at the dawn of the Hittite Kingdom.

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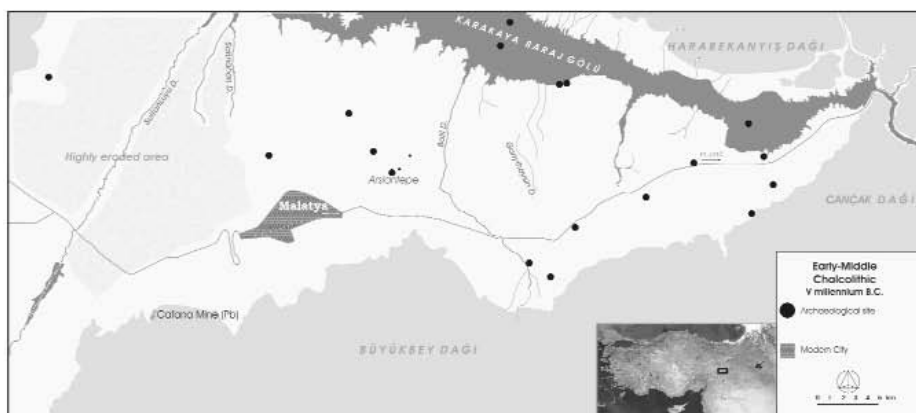
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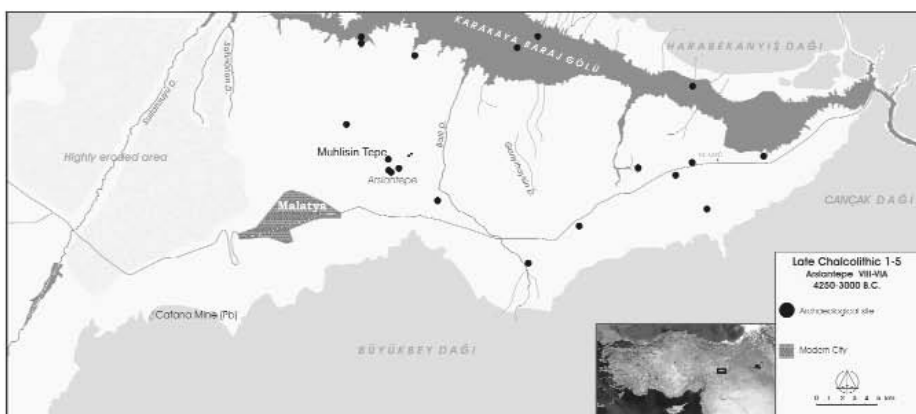
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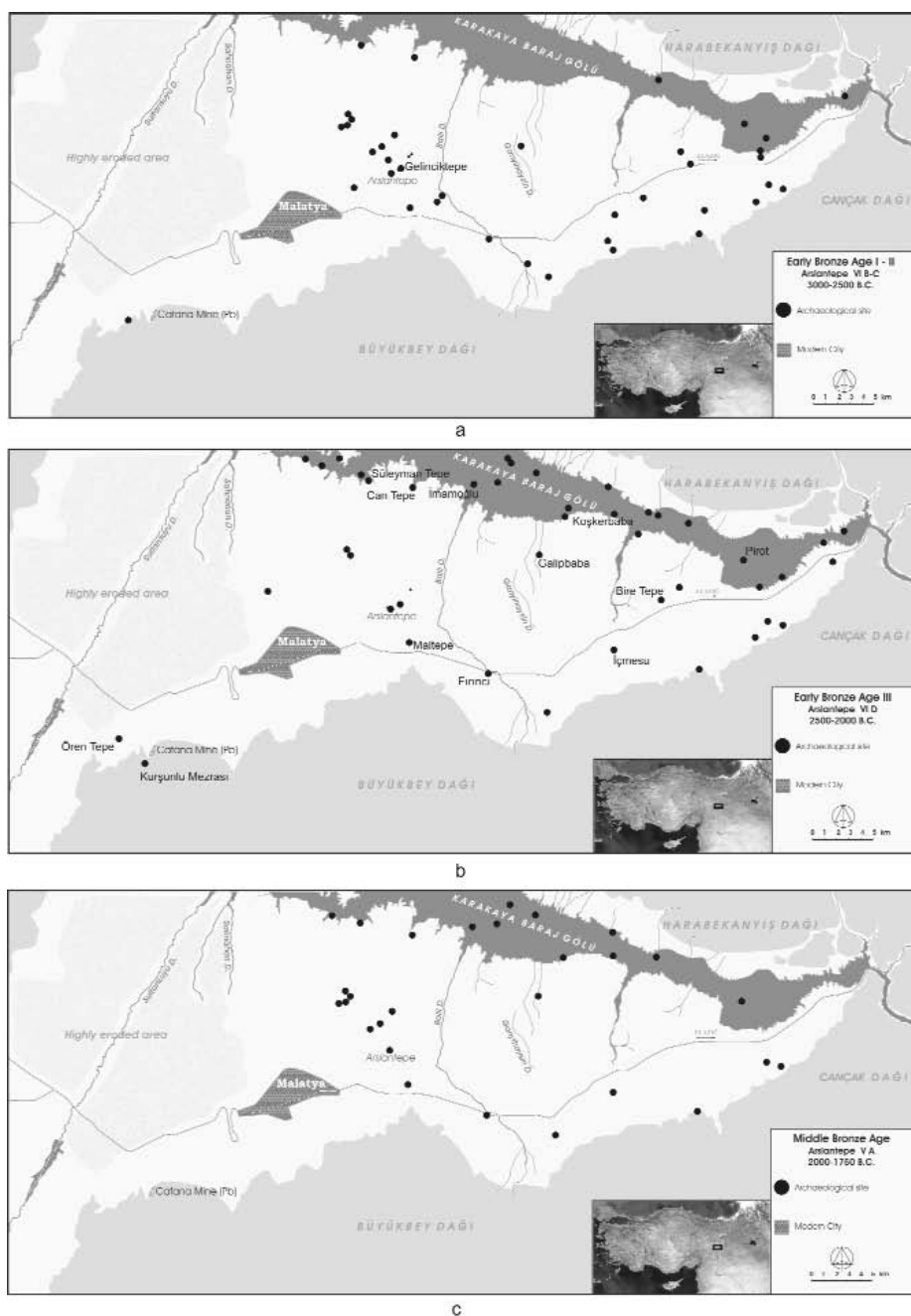


b



c

Fig. 1: Archaeological survey in the Malatya plain. a) Soyuz satellite image; b) Early-Middle Chalcolithic; c) Late Chalcolithic.



SITE TYPOLOGY ACCORDING TO GEOMORPHOLOGIC CATEGORIES	
Tabular summit	Mostly calcareous-dolomitic and secondarily arenaceous sedimentary strata, with a sub-horizontal attitude. The archaeological material is mostly distributed on the summit and secondarily along the flanks.
Natural hill	Isolated relief with a regular and simple profile, commonly with light slopes and a rounded mound top, on which a shallow anthropic deposit and dispersed material is found. Material is at times also recovered along the slopes.
Complex of hills	Group of undulating relieves, at times also with strongly steep slopes. The archaeological site is in general in the sheer zones -these areas preserve shallow anthropic strata and/or on the summit of one of the relieves composing the group.
«Glacis»	Accordant level with a very slight slope connecting the detrital sediments and the wide valley floor.
Flat land	Portion of the Malatya plain that has a minimal or absent slope. The sites emerge as concentrated dispersions of materials.
Artificial and isolated hill: Höyük (in Turkish) or tell (in Arabic)	Isolated relief that emerges as a conspicuous point of the environment, above the surrounding plain, formed wholly by an anthropic stratification. Two subcategories are distinguishable: a) Höyük developing directly on the surrounding plain; b) Höyük that develops on a natural preexistent hill. In this case the line of contact between the geological and anthropic deposit is distinguishable.

Tab. 1

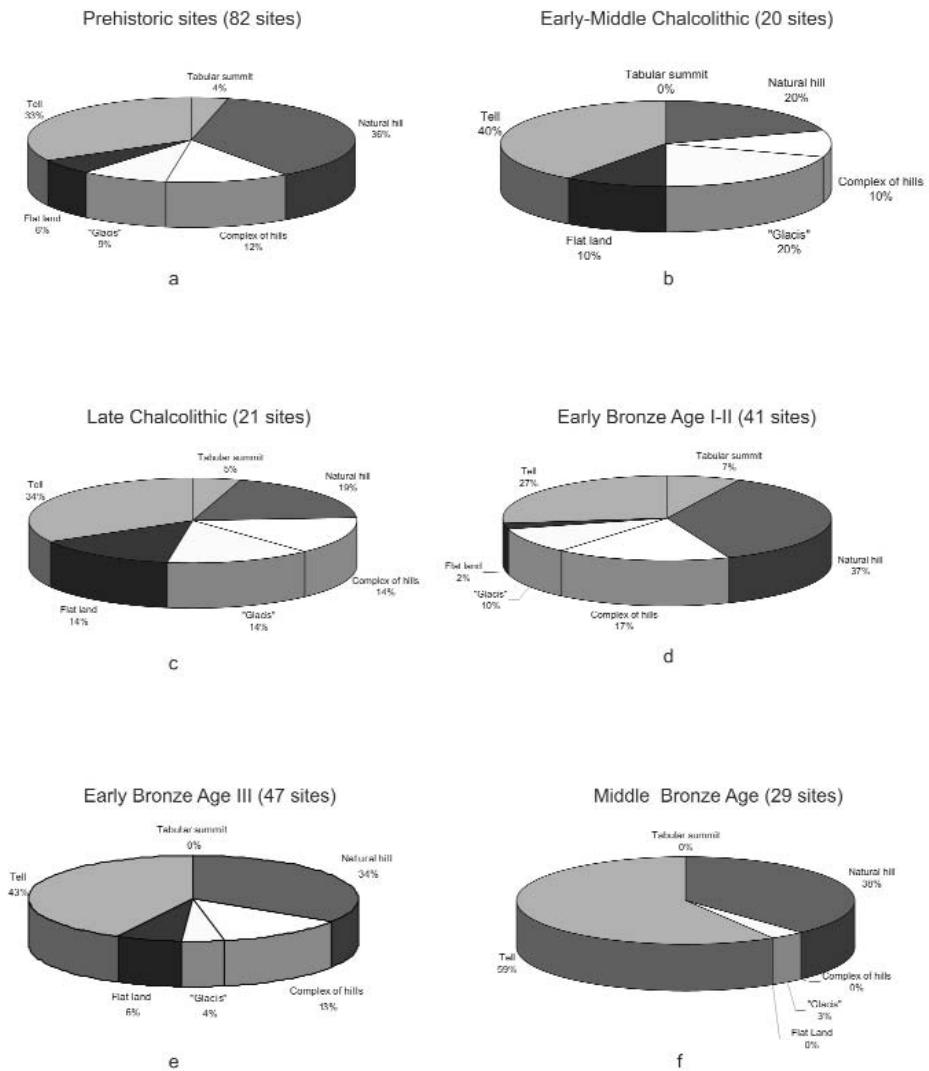


Fig. 3: Archaeological survey in the Malatya plain. Site typology according to geomorphologic categories.

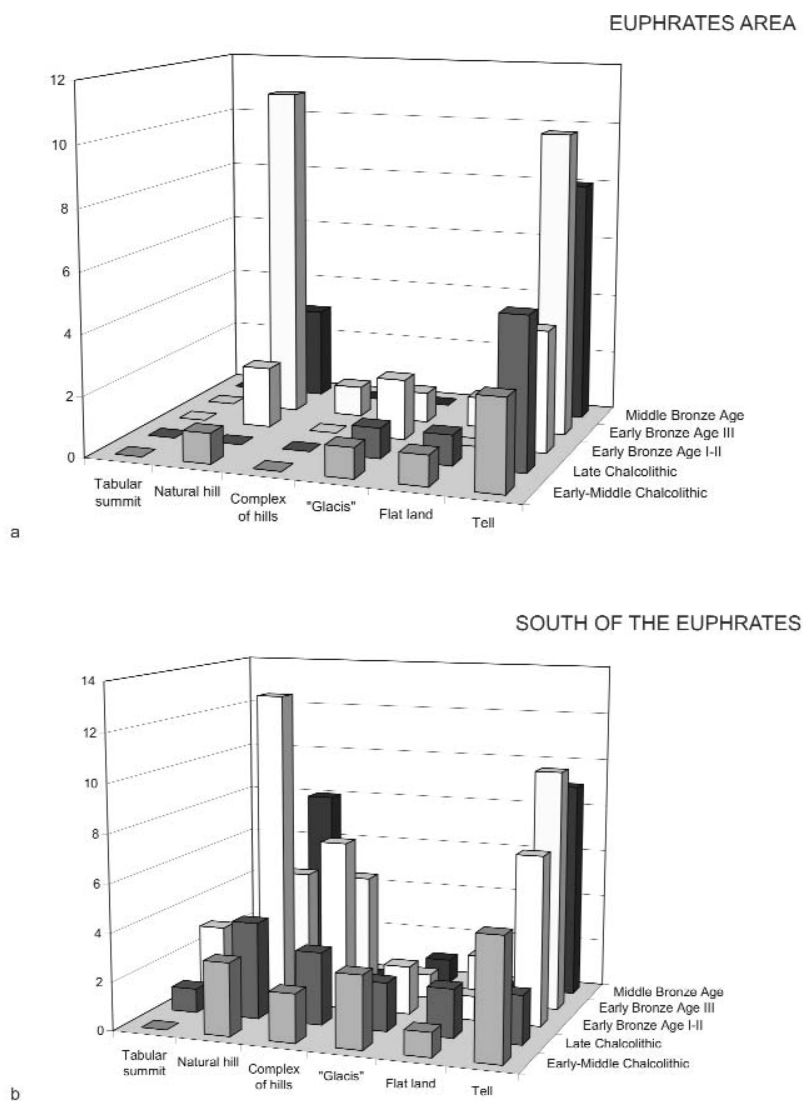


Fig. 4: Archaeological survey in the Malatya plain. Site typology according to geomorphologic categories: a) Euphrates area; b) south of the Euphrates.

