

DATA PAPER

Diachronic and Spatial Distribution of Khabur Ware in the Early Second Millennium BC

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The dataset provides the diachronic and spatial distribution of Khabur ware in upper Mesopotamia and central Anatolia in the early second millennium BC (ca. 1900-1750 BC) by evaluating the ceramic evidence coming from excavated archaeological sites. Khabur ware is wheel-made pottery with monochrome geometric painted decoration in red, brown or black, which owes its name to the archaeologist Max Mallowan after that great quantities of it were found by him at the site of Chagar Bazar, in the Upper Khabur valley. Nevertheless, the data yielded from the archaeological excavations show that this pottery is not just confined in the Khabur basin, but spreads in northern Iraq, Syria and in a few sites in Iran and Turkey. This kind of pottery can be studied and analysed as fossil guide for detecting possible political and economic dynamics that caused its spread in Upper Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia in the Middle Bronze Age.

Keywords: archaeology, GIS, landscape, pottery

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Context

Khabur ware is a suite of wheel-made pottery with monochrome geometric painted decoration in red, brown or black, which owes its name to the archaeologist Max Mallowan who found great quantities of these ceramics at the site of Chagar Bazar in the Upper Khabur valley¹. The term Khabur ware is currently used to indicate a homogenous ceramic group distributed predominantly in upper Mesopotamia from approximately the late Isin-Larsa Period (ca. 1900 BC) until the early period of Kassite rule (1400 BC) in southern Mesopotamia². Khabur ware can be divided into four main shape categories: 1) jars; 2) beakers, cups or goblets, 3) bowls and 4) "grain measures".

Generally, the earliest Khabur ware examples can be dated to around 1900 BC. Nevertheless, given the rarity of archaeological sites yielding levels belonging to the 20th century BC, this should be considered as a provisional start date that might be extended slightly further back in time in the light of future evidence. A phasing and periodization of this ceramic group has been recently proposed by Oguchi³ on the basis of the evidence from Tell Jigan (areas A, B and C), Tell Der Hall, Tell Fisna, Tell Jessary and Tell Thuwajj. In the light of further discoveries of Khabur ware vessels in the Qarni-Lim's palace at Tell Leilan, Oguchi has proposed new four Khabur ware phases⁵:

- Phase 1 (1900-1812 BC);
- Phase 2 (1812-1750/30 BC);

- Phase 3 (1750/30-1550 BC);
- Phase 4 (1550-1400 BC).

The available data allow us to delineate two main chronological stages framed in two distribution areas. The first stage (ca. 1900-1812 BC) matches with the Khabur ware I period, while the second stage is represented by Shamshi-Adad I and Ishme-Dagan's kingdoms (ca. 1812-1750 BC). There are still continuing difficulties in recognizing Middle Bronze Age versus Late Bronze Age's Khabur ware due to variable collection routines in the past, the only partial investigation of Middle Bronze Age layers and the uncertainty of the stratigraphic sequences. Since the absence of workshop or kiln evidence does not allow us to define individual production centres, the only criterion that has been adopted by the scholars for identifying such centres has been the mere number of potsherds and whole vessels yielded by each archaeological site^{4,3}.

Despite these issues, two kinds of distribution areas have been delineated for Khabur ware by other commentators: 1) a core, main distribution zone (Upper Khabur valley) and 2) a secondary or peripheral distribution zone.

Khabur ware phase I (ca. 1900-1812 BC) has been securely attested at Tell Billa, Tell al-Rimah, Tell Jigan and Tell Taya. Other archaeological sites yielding vessels and potsherds that may be dated to the first phase are Tell Muhammed Diyab, Tell Barri, Tell Brak, Chagar Bazar (level I) and Tell Mozan (Area P). Just two sites not belonging

to the main distribution zone have yielded Khabur ware that may be dated to the first phase: Dinkha Tepe and Hasanlu to the east. That could suggest that the Khabur ware was originally produced in the above defined zone and subsequently (phases 2-4) spread across the rest of Upper Mesopotamia. In the secondary zone, occurrences of Khabur ware are far few and the pottery assemblage yielded by the peripheral sites differs from that of the sites located within the main distribution zone. The presence of Khabur ware in this area could be the result of imports and inter-regional economic and social contacts among people living in Upper Mesopotamia.

Spatial Coverage

- Description: Iraq Syria, Turkey (country); Middle East (macro-region).
- Geographic Coordinate system: World Geodetic System (WGS) 1984.
- Datum: World Geodetic System (WGS) 1984.
- Northern boundary: 38.850170 dd (decimal degrees)
- Southern boundary: 34.207629 dd
- Eastern boundary: 45.536743 dd
- Western boundary: 35.635296 dd

Temporal Coverage

- Start date: ca. 1900 BC
- End date: ca. 1750 BC

Methods

Steps

Khabur ware pottery was recorded in a database, including complete vessels, diagnostic sherds such as rims that allowed an easy and sure classification, as well as those base and body sherds that might be placed within the above shape categories with reasonable certainty. Any further sherd that could not be categorized by shape, have simply been counted by site. The database is composed of published/unpublished whole vessels and diagnostic potsherds (n = 1696) dated to the early 2nd millennium BC (ca. 1900-1750 BC). The published data come from the archaeological excavations reports concerning the archaeological sites (n = 48) yielding Khabur ware, while the unpublished data have been retrieved by studying the material stored in the British Museum and in the UCL institute of Archaeology's collection. The data have been stored in a spatial database where for each site there is a series of information of its Khabur ware assemblage (e.g. n. of potsherds, shape typology, context provenance, periodization, etc.).

Sampling Strategy

The data have been collected by using all published archaeological excavations reports concerning sites that have yielded Khabur Ware. 18 whole vessels (17 unpublished) coming from Ashurs (n=1), Chagar Bazar (n=14), Hasanlu (n=1), Tell Arbit (n=1) and Tell Brak (n=1) have been recorded from The British Museum. 3 unpublished whole vessels from Chagar Bazar (n=2) and Tell Brak (n=1) have been retrieved in UCL Institute of Archaeology's collection.

Quality Control

All published data have been examined in detail by also making use, wherever possible, of the archaeological stratigraphic sequence of the contexts in which the whole vessels and/or potsherds were found.

Constraints

Uncertain periodization of some vessels/potsherds due to the unreliable archaeological stratigraphic sequence provided by the published excavation reports of sites investigated in the early twentieth century. Considerable amount of data still unpublished and difficult to access given the actual political situation in Syria.

Dataset Description

Object Name

- *pottery.csv*, *pottery.txt* – two files providing the data and metadata (.csv, .txt respectively) for records collected by making use of published archaeological excavations reports and objects stored in the British museum and in the UCL institute of Archaeology's collection.
- *references.txt* – a file providing a list of references (.txt file) of published data stored in the *pottery.csv* database (see field "references").
- *sites.shp* – a vector point dataset (.shp and associated files) representing the archaeological sites yielding Khabur ware.
- *sites_bis.kmz* – a vector point dataset loadable in Google Earth (.kmz file) representing the archaeological sites yielding Khabur ware.

Data Type

Primary data/processed data

Format Names and Versions

.csv, .txt, .shp, .kmz

Creation Dates

The dataset was created between September and December 2011.

Dataset Creators

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Repository Location

UCL Discovery:

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Language

English

License

CC0

Reuse Potential

The present dataset provides a good basis and a start point for people dealing with the study of Khabur Ware. This kind of material culture represents an important

