

On the Tail End of Variation in Late Neolithic Burial Practices

Halaf Feasting and Cannibalism at Domuztepe,
Southeastern Anatolia

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Dating to approximately 6500–5000 BC, the Samarra, Hassuna, Ubaid, and Halaf cultures comprise the Late Neolithic of northern Mesopotamia. In this chapter we discuss how data from the Late Halaf site of Domuztepe both conform with and differ from known Late Neolithic mortuary practices (Akkermans 1989; Campbell 1995). In particular, while the Domuztepe burials are broadly similar to those from other Mesopotamian sites, we briefly summarize our ongoing analysis (Gauld et al. n.d.) of a large pit deposit (Feature 148) that contains the remains of at least 35 humans and a similar number of animals. We suggest that this deposit, less formally known as the Death Pit, documents a ritual communal feast (Kansa and Campbell 2004), where the inclusion of large-scale cannibalism both underscores and expands known variability in Halaf mortuary practices and indicates a degree of cultural dynamism and social complexity not previously evident during this period.

The Halaf tradition is represented in a group of sites distributed in a broad arc across the mountain foothills of northern Mesopotamia, from southeastern Anatolia to western Iran. Distinct markers of its material culture include the presence of both rectangular and round (*tholoi*) structures, decorated polychrome pottery, and stamp seals likely used to mark personal goods (Akkermans and Duistermaat 1996). Throughout most of

Halaf history, villages were small (1 to 3 hectares) with short occupation sequences, low population densities, and architecture generally characterized by small domestic residences and a lack of buildings or spaces that could have served a public function. Subsistence was based primarily on dry farming and animal husbandry augmented by varying degrees of dependence on wild animals and plants (Watson 1982). However, some Halaf sites, particularly Late Halaf period settlements such as Domuztepe, are large, some of them more than 10 hectares. This regional and temporal variability in size, marked by differences in site location, length or season of occupation, and differences in plant and animal exploitation, is reflected in observed variation in Halaf architecture and cultural attributes (Akkermans 1993; Kansa, Kennedy et al. 2009, Tables A1 and A2). Moreover, while Halaf social organization has been described as egalitarian (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003; Joffe 2003; Frangipane 2009), it is likely that the methods used to solve social tensions, particularly those associated with larger population size, also varied within Halaf culture.

Domuztepe

The site of Domuztepe, located between the modern cities of Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, lies at the northwestern edge of the Halaf cultural tradition (Figure 1.1). Although surveys indicate repeated occupations from the Hellenistic through Middle Islamic periods, recent archaeological investigations (1997–2005) have focused on the site's prehistoric deposits. Material remains from these levels demonstrate clear affinities with the Late Halaf period (Carter, Campbell, and Gauld 2003; Kansa, Gauld et al. 2009). Radiocarbon dates show that these early occupation levels date to between 5800 and 5450 cal BC.

A major distinguishing characteristic of Domuztepe is its size, which at 20 hectares constitutes one of the largest terminal Neolithic sites in the Near East, possibly containing a population that approached 1,500 inhabitants (Carter, Campbell, and Gauld 2003; Kansa, Gauld et al. 2009). Like other large and relatively long-lived Halaf sites, Domuztepe's success is attributable to its location in an area of adequate rainfall and resource productivity. Faunal and botanical remains from the site indicate that its inhabitants relied on a well-established mixed economy dominated by high proportions of the typical suite of Near Eastern domesticates, while

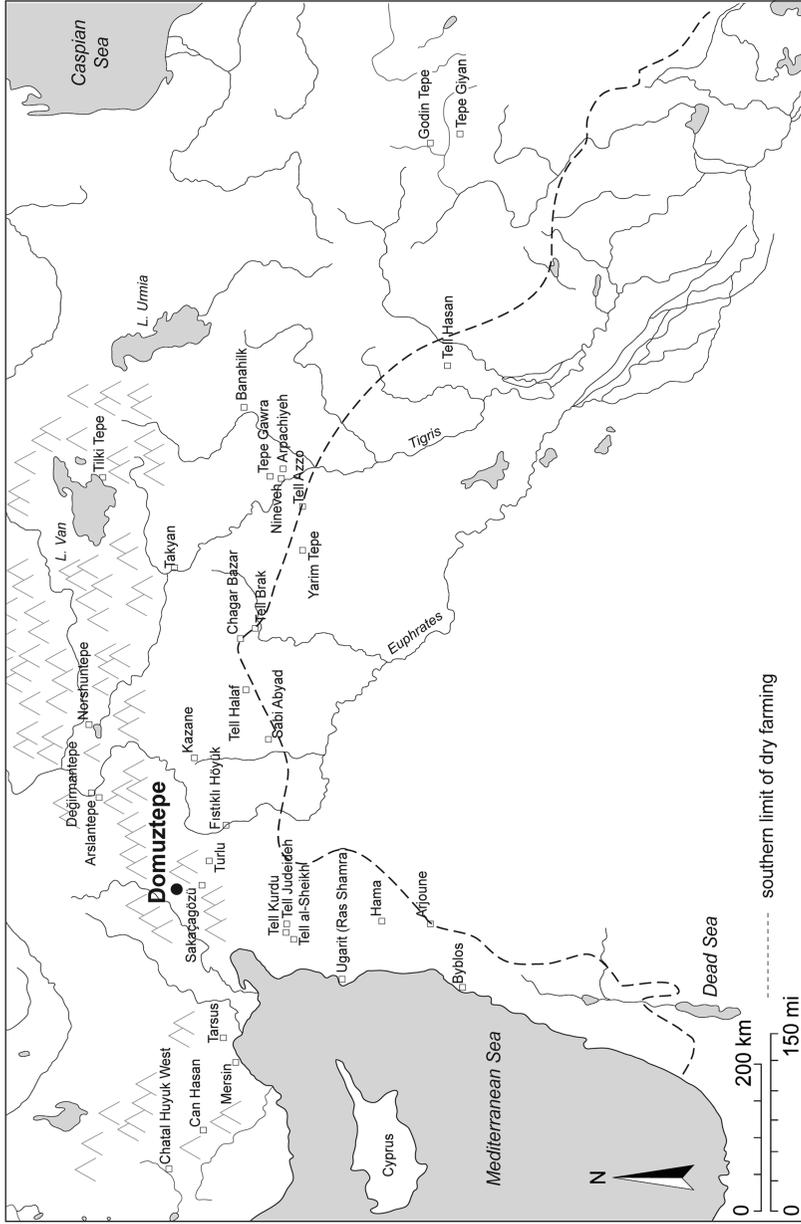


Figure 1.1. Location of Domuztepe in relation to distribution of Halaf Pottery Neolithic sites across northern Mesopotamia. Drawn by J. Dillon, adapted from Carter 2011.

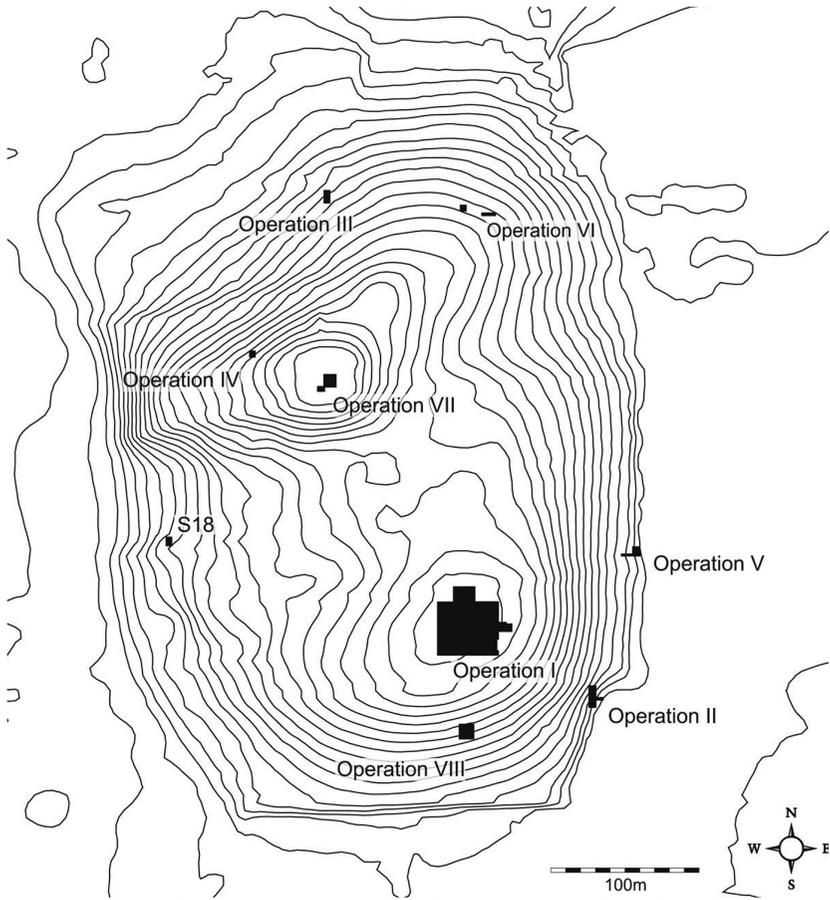


Figure 1.2. Contour map of Domuztepe showing major areas of excavation as of 2005. Drawn by S. Campbell, adapted from Kansa et al. 2009b.

nearby marshy and upland ecological zones likely provided access to a wide variety of non-agricultural resources (Kansa, Kennedy et al. 2009). In addition, ceramics from Domuztepe show strong links with areas to the south along the Levantine coast, while obsidian imported from a variety of sources demonstrates extensive trade networks to the east and west (Carter, Campbell, and Gauld 2003; Kansa, Gauld et al. 2009). These imports suggest that Domuztepe may have garnered some economic benefits from its location on the northwestern boundary of the Halaf cultural world.