ANATOLIAN STUDIES

Journal of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara

Volume 50 2000



Published annually by
THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AT ANKARA
10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH

ISSN 0066-1546

Hearth structures in the religious pattern of Early Bronze Age northeast Anatolia

Turan Takaoğlu

Çanakkale Onsekizmart Üniversitesi

The archaeology of Early Bronze Age northeast Anatolia has often been characterised by the dominant presence of the so-called Karaz Ware, a black burnished ware often decorated in relief. In northeast Anatolia, this distinctive ceramic tradition is represented in the archaeological contexts of major excavated sites of the Erzurum plain: Karaz, Güzelova, Pulur, Büyüktepe, and Sos Höyük (Kosay, Turfan 1959; Kosay, Vary 1964; 1967; Sagona et al 1993; Sagona et al 1996). Nevertheless, it is not something unique to the sites of northeast Anatolia, but a widely occurring phenomenon at third millennium BC sites from Transcaucasia to Syria-Palestine under other names such as Kura-Araxes Ware, Early Transcaucasian Ware, or Khirbet Kerak Ware (Burney 1989: 45ff; Edens 1995: 53). Even though it is handmade, its quality, manufacture and distinctive relief decoration, and its widespread distribution in northeast Anatolia and surrounding regions, demonstrate that it had a cultural and economic value attached to it. The widespread use of this pottery may be explained as evidence of a movement of nomadic pastoral groups or traders who also brought their pots or potting techniques with them. Although the newcomers responsible for this phenomenon appear to be small in number, the intermixing of the older local Late Chalcolithic populations and newcomers seems to have led to local variations in this ware in different spatial and temporal contexts (Rothman, Kozbe 1997).

Such an inference may be drawn from the religious activities practised by the users of this distinctive pottery. The similarities in the material assemblages in such a broad geographical area allow us to draw close parallels among the regions when investigating the religious pattern of northeast Anatolia. In terms of religion, archaeological knowledge of northeast Anatolia is still inadequate partly due to both the sparseness of excavations and lack of contextual evidence to analyse the religious patterns of the Early Bronze Age settlements. The early excavations that were carried out in northeastern Anatolia seem to provide valuable information on the religious characteristics of the people that existed there. The sites of Karaz, Güzelova and Pulur have yielded various portable horned objects of consecration in great quantities (Kosay, Turfan 1959; Kosay, Vary 1964; 1967; Diamant, Rutter 1969). These objects may be considered as the material manifestation of the cultic-ritual life of the people living in the Erzurum plain.

I would like to thank the Directorate-General of Ancient Monuments and Museums for granting me permission to study the unpublished horseshoe-shaped hearth from Cinis Höyük. These two fragments of an anthropomorphic hearth from Cinis Höyük, found in 1974 by a villager after a geomorphic deformation at the site, are currently inventoried at the Museum of Erzurum as 33.1.74 and 34.1.74 along with a group of pottery with which they are associated.

The finds of cult objects such as the anthropomorphic horse-shoe shaped hearth from Cinis Höyük (fig 2a) and horned objects from Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova (e.g. figs 2d-e) may enhance our understanding of common domestic rituals that might have been performed at household shrines. It seems reasonable to reinterpret the function of these household objects to reconstruct the belief system of the Early Bronze Age people of northeast Anatolia. It is well established that the household cult was a new phenomenon in northeast Anatolia at this period. Excluding the shrines from Pulur (Sakyol) (Yakar 1985: 279), there is no archaeological evidence to demonstrate the presence of religious structures like the shrines of Beycesultan. The religious use of houses in prehistoric Anatolian settlements has its roots at least as early as the Neolithic period, as demonstrated at Çatalhöyük. The continuation of household shrines in Bronze Age Anatolia were reconsidered by Winifred Lamb, according to whom the household hearths were an important part of religious life as observed on the Kusura horns and Kültepe hearth structures (Lamb 1956: fig 1).

In view of the scarcity of religious structures or shrines in the Early Bronze Age settlements of northeast Anatolia, it is the household objects that inform us best about the religious nature of the inhabitants. Judging from the great number of horned objects of consecration

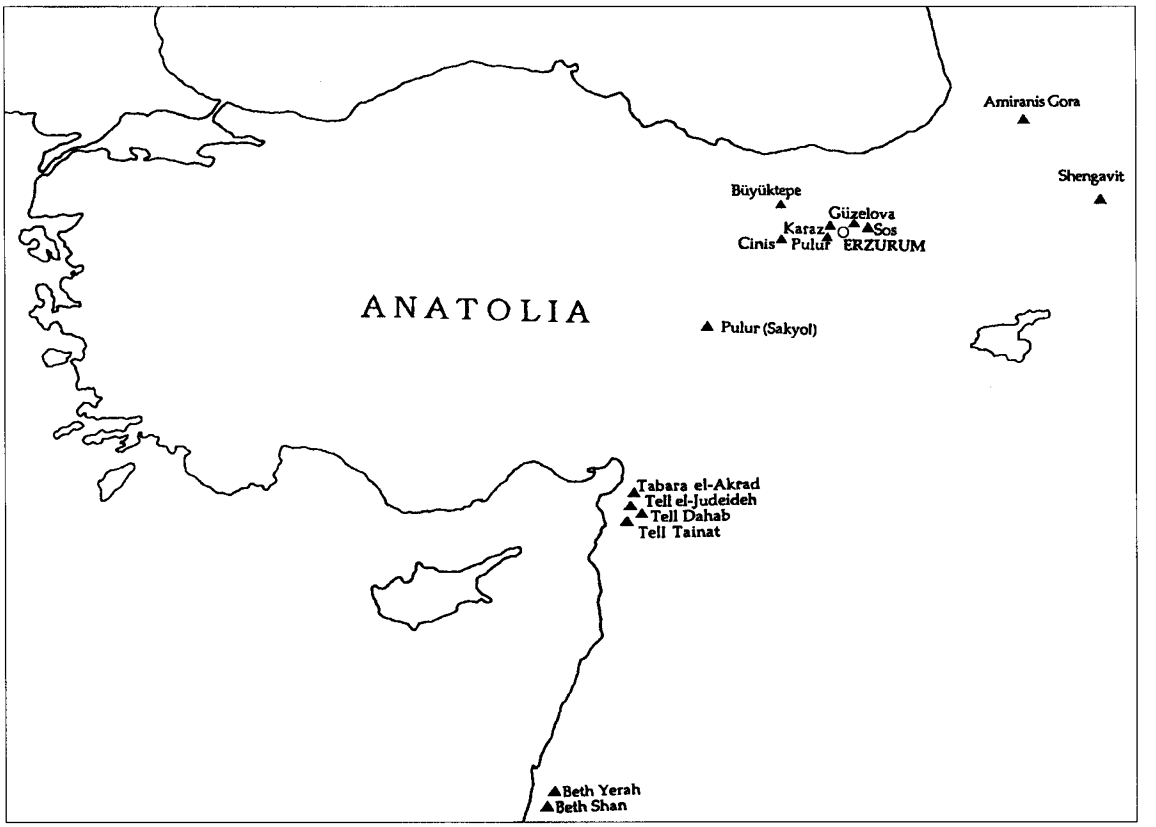


Fig 1. Major sites mentioned in the text

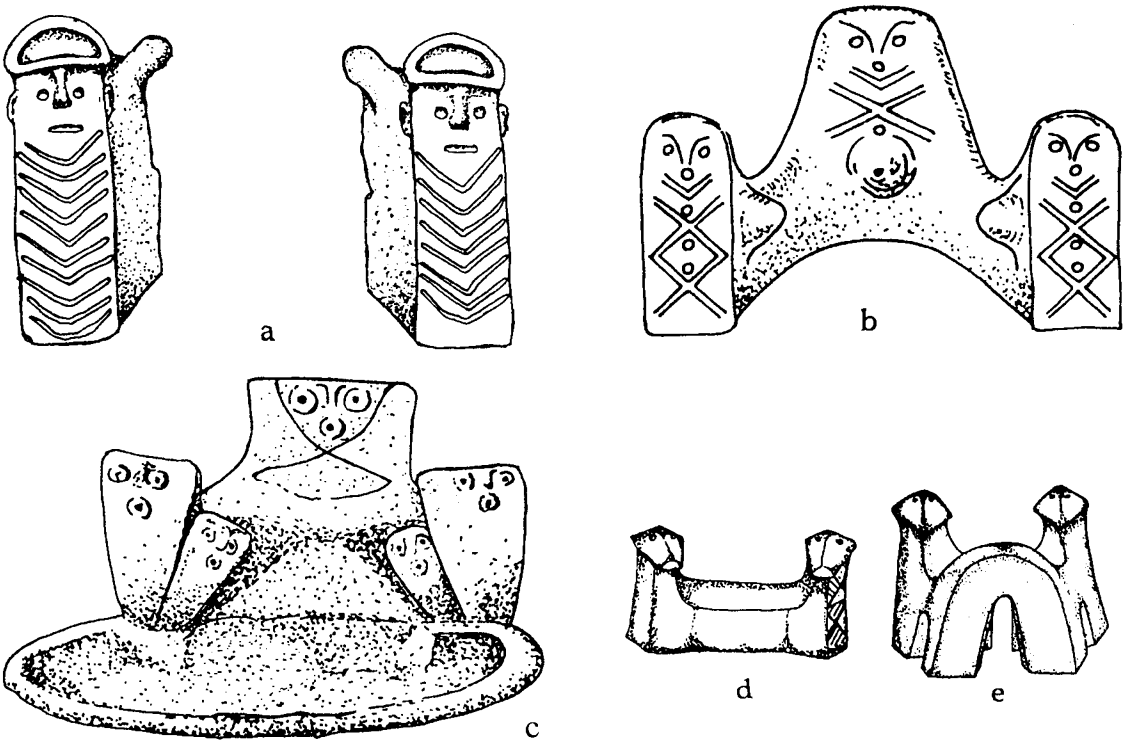


Fig 2. (a) Cinis Höyük, (b) Tabara el-Akrad, (c) Pulur (Sakyol), (d-e) Güzelova (not to scale). After Hood 1951; Kosay 1967; 1976

and anthropomorphic hearths found in these sites, fire appears to have been an important element for the Early Bronze Age society of the Erzurum plain. Evidence supporting the ritual use of fire is provided by the excavations at Pulur, Güzelova and Karaz Höyük. These sites yielded analogous material assemblages suggesting close cultural affinities. Symbolic objects of different forms and sizes may not be easily explained as items of daily use, but they may also have served religious functions. For example, at Güzelova numerous two-horned objects seem to have had a ritual rather than utilitarian function due to their small size and shape (e.g. fig 2d-e). Another small horned object used in combination with fire has been reported from a burial at Güzelova (Kosay, Vary 1964: 7, fig 258). It would appear to be a votive offering. Moreover, it suggests that the small horned objects in a mortuary context and additionally associated with fire may be linked to an ancestral cult or to the underworld.

Two unpublished fragments of an anthropomorphic horseshoe-shaped hearth, recovered in 1974 from the site of Cinis Höyük, shed new light on the religious nature of northeastern Anatolia in the Early Bronze Age. The horseshoe-shaped hearth from Cinis Höyük, which is of the same orange-buff clay as the pottery with which it is associated, is roughly fashioned into a human likeness (fig 2a, 3, 4). Close parallels for the anthropomorphic horseshoe-shaped hearth of Cinis Höyük have been previously reported from Beth Shan (FitzGerald 1935: pl X.18) and Beth Yerah in Palestine (Amiran 1952: pl 6d; 1989), Tabara el-Akrad, Tell el-Judeideh, Tell Tainat, and Tell Dahab in the Amuq plain (Hood 1951: fig 9; Braidwood 1969: figs 290-1) and Shengavit and Amiranis Gora in the Caucasus (Chubunishvili 1966: fig 31). Frankel (1992/3: fig 9f) also published an example from Marki, Cyprus, which has incised decorations instead of human representations. These horseshoe-shaped hearths often exhibit projecting centrepieces and vertical façades which are moulded or incised with a human face. The faces are often ornamented with grooves around and below them. The hearths' feet and centrepieces each also have a knob facing inwards that can serve as a support for a pot. Notwithstanding, local variations of the basic form do exist. In terms of anatomical details, the hearth from Cinis Höyük appears to be a more elaborated form of the type. The presence of what appears to be a head dress as well as a series of impressed chevrons on the lower halves of the figures have no close parallels in the other anthropomorphic hearths. The Cinis Höyük anthropomorphic hearth indicates that it has a unique style of local origin. The Cinis Höyük hearth may be compared to the one found by Hood at Tabara el-Akrad, which is one of the most complete examples of this type (fig 2b). Previously, it was believed that a tradition of anthropomorphic hearths did not exist in northeast Anatolia. The hearth from Cinis Höyük demonstrates that this specific tradition existed in this area as well, and fills the gap between the Kura-Araxes basin and Syria-Palestine.

Ruth Amiran has suggested that these horseshoe-shaped hearths served for cultic-ritual functions (Amiran 1989; see also Diamant, Rutter 1969; Lamb 1956), even though close parallels of these objects have widely been identified variously as pot stands, fenders, or as andirons (Braidwood 1969; Hood 1951). They are the most distinctive household artefacts with a possible religious use. According to Amiran, these anthropomorphic hearths bear great similarities to examples found in level X at the site of Pulur (Sakyol) Höyük (fig 2c) (Amiran 1989). These examples are reported to have served a cultic-ritual use (Kosay 1976: pls 19, 21, 37). The differences between those examples from Pulur and the rest, in particular the absence of inward facing knobs in those from Pulur, can be explained as regional variation or may suggest that the Pulur examples are earlier prototypes. These hearths were found with the fragments of idols suggesting that the hearths were not manufactured for an ordinary daily use, but rather as cultic-ritual objects. It was primarily based on the Pulur examples that Ruth Amiran proposed a reinterpretation of function for these objects, preferring cultic-ritual use at household shrines to secular uses as fenders or andirons. The anthropomorphic hearths of Pulur (Sakyol) Höyük have so far provided the most important data in interpreting their function.

Other important data to explain the function of these hearths can be drawn from the Caucasian examples of the Early Transcaucasian period. The Transcaucasian hearths are represented by a form that are intended to represent seated males with their legs apart, while only the centre has an anthropomorphic representation (Chubunishvili 1966: 171). Chubunishvili described them as '...the image of idols, the fetishes of the virile spirit, or of the chief patriarch' (1966: 171). It would appear that the hearth is personified as a male character as in the Erzurum plain. In addition, one of the hearths of this type from the Caucasus is reported to have a bowl on the top of its head for libations (Chubunishvili 1963: 95), perhaps a form of head-dress. This example could be taken as further evidence of household cultic-ritual use.

The reconstruction of ancient religion in preliterate Anatolia has long been neglected by many scholars because more speculations are involved in archaeological interpretation (Yakar 1985: 417). In situations where the cult institutions are not identifiable in the

archaeological record, the function of the hearth in question can be predicted in ethnographic terms. Ethnoarchaeological research sometimes can provide useful models in explaining the archaeological problems. In our case, the application of ethnographic comparison, already observed by Koşay (1979: 78), appears to be quite striking for northeast Anatolia. The town of Ispir, near the province of Erzurum, seems to have maintained the vestiges of this ancient tradition. Ethnographic observations of Kosay in northeast Anatolia suggest that fire and the household hearth have played a significant and continuous role in the ritual and daily lives of the people since as early as the Early Bronze Age. Koşay was struck by the villagers' use of '*Gil Hassa*!', an expression of reaction in times of a sudden flaming up of household fire in the town of modern day Ispir near Erzurum (1979: 78). He knew well that '*Gil*' is a Turkish word meaning family or house in a number of regional dialects and even in some Caucasian languages. '*Hašša*', on the other hand, is reminiscent of a Hittite word for hearth. Thus, a comparison may be drawn from the Hittite religion in elucidating the Early Bronze Age ritual patterns of northeast Anatolia. The role of the hearth in Hittite religion has already been clearly demonstrated (Archi 1975: 77-87; Popko 1978: 48ff; Haas 1994: 249ff). It is reasonable to infer from these works that the hearth was one of the basic elements of the house structure that seems to have had its own personality, often deified. According to the Hittite literary evidence, the hearth was an important cult-object in their belief system in which a deity often manifested itself in the form of a human being and could take up temporary residence in the ritual object. The hearth is clearly personified and closely identified with the force of nature. The essence of deities was believed to be the power or force behind the manifestation. The *Hašša* within Hittite religion formed part of a belief in which the hearth was perceived as a means of communicating with the gods. It also served additional roles linked to the underworld, family unity and purification. The Hittite texts referring to *Hašša* concern the élite level centred around the hearth within the palace, but are vague in terms of domestic ritual patterns. Nevertheless, there may have been common factors shared between élite and lower level.

Archi recognised some possible links with Hurri elements in hearth-related ritual that are not Indo-European in character (Archi 1975; see also Otten, Mayrhoffer 1965). If hearth-centred ritual is not purely Hittite in character, Hittite ritual involving the personification of the hearth might have included some native Anatolian ritual characteristics. Such an indigenous concept might have been delivered to the Hittites by the Hurrians, whose influence on Hittite religion is very well attested. Prior to their appearance in the Anatolian scene, the incoming Indo-European population of Anatolia might have been introduced to some indigenous non-Indo-European Hurrian customs, though the hearth was also commonly important in many Indo-European cultures. As such, the fire or hearth-associated household ritual might be a ritual pattern that already existed among the native Anatolian and Caucasian prehistoric societies. Such an assumption may well explain the awareness of the *Hašša* in the Erzurum area before it was handed down to the present. If the Early Bronze Age people of the Erzurum plain were acquainted with *Hašša*, their ritual might have involved the hearth and fire related horned objects of consecration. Thus, it is possible that the hearth from Cinis Höyük served a cultic-ritual function similar to parallels found from the Transcaucasia to south of the Sea of Galilee, Palestine. The anthropomorphic features may even personify a certain male deity, perhaps a god of the hearth, *Hašša*. Due to the vital and sacred role of fire, the hearth may have been deified, which led to its personification represented by the human likeness. The personification of the power of fire that preoccupied the Bronze Age northeast Anatolian society may well have served as a means to communicate with supernatural concepts that they feared.

In conclusion, the result of this paper can be restated as follows. The anthropomorphic hearth of Cinis Höyük and the fire-related horned objects of consecration from Karaz, Güzelova and Pulur demonstrate that fire played a crucial and critical role in prehistoric human behaviour in this part of Anatolia, and therefore the god of the hearth was a vital deity for people in a cold environment. The hearth structure, being an important aspect of Early Bronze Age society in the Erzurum region, may have been a significant component of their belief system. Ethnographic examination suggests that fire was an important element around which their rituals were performed. Although we must proceed with caution using the single ethnographic case of the native belief system from Ispir, Erzurum, this surviving linguistic element may be a part of a long religious tradition going back to as early as the middle of the third millennium BC. Thus, the modern use of '*Gil Hassa*' in the Erzurum plain can be accepted as a supporting criterion in reconstructing the ancient perception of fire and its significant role in their belief system. The Early Bronze Age people of northeast Anatolia in the Erzurum plain seem to have personified their household objects as the Hittites did. Hearth structures, or similar objects associated with fire, are the best indications of such deification. The Cinis Höyük example further indicates that the Early Bronze



Fig 3. Hearth structures from Cinis Höyük



Fig 4. Detail

Age people of the Erzurum plain personified their hearth as a male god as did Transcaucasian and Syro-Palestinian contemporaries. Several other objects also display features of consecration by having two horns as observed at Karaz, Güzelova and Pulur. In the absence of further contextual evidence to demonstrate the religious structures at this period and in this part of Anatolia, it is reasonable to agree with the assertion that the Early Bronze Age people of northeast Anatolia performed their religious acts in their own households around their hearth, which they personified and deified.

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