

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Throughout its history, Mesopotamia underwent several critical stages of urban development. One of the most significant of these was the 'Uruk Expansion' during the latter half of the 4th millennium BCE. This period witnessed explosive urban growth and the rise of a regionally hierarchical network of urban centers in the southern alluvium (Adams 1981). A defining feature of the expansion was the spread of Uruk material culture—including pottery, glyphic designs, cylinder seals, and architectural styles—across the Syro-Mesopotamian region and surrounding highlands. However, the extent of this influence varied considerably depending on the region.

At the heart of this phenomenon is Guillermo Algaze's Uruk World System (Algaze 1993), the most widely accepted framework for explaining interactions between southern Mesopotamian core cities and resource-rich peripheral regions, despite ongoing criticism of its theoretical assumptions. This model has inspired extensive research into the material culture associated with the Uruk Expansion phenomenon and the cultural interactions at the time. Nevertheless, a key gap remains: the absence of stratified, detailed, and statistical comparisons of pottery assemblages across sites classified as enclaves, stations, and outposts.

This literature review contextualizes the Uruk Expansion within broader theoretical debates, evaluates existing scholarship on pottery typology, and identifies gaps necessitating a focused, site-to-site comparative typological analysis. Such an analysis can offer insights into how Uruk influence varied within and across settlement categories, shedding light on broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics during this transformative period.

### **Uruk World System**

Applying world-system theory (Wallerstein 1974) to the "core" area of southern Mesopotamia and imperial theory (Gallagher and Robinson 1953) to the "periphery" area of the north, the Uruk World System views the Uruk Expansion as a southward-favoring interaction network led by the southern Mesopotamian city-states.

The impetus for this complex network lay in the asymmetric resource endowments of the two regions: the resource-scarce core, where urban centers developed on the alluvial plains, and the resource-rich periphery, offering timber, copper, and precious stones. Driven by resource demand, the southern Mesopotamian city-states expanded their influence across greater Mesopotamia, with control levels varying by local conditions and economic factors. In the neighboring Susiana plain of Khuzestan, Uruk influence was formalized, while in the upper Euphrates and Tigris regions, it remained more informal. Consequently, in the northern periphery, enclaves (large southern settlements occupying strategic locations of important waterways or overland routes), stations (smaller sites with southern material culture along lines of communication), and

outposts (isolated settlements with a range of Uruk material culture at critical location in distant regions) were established to facilitate trade and support economic activities.

While the Uruk World System offers a compelling explanation for the Uruk Expansion, it has faced significant criticism from scholars who question its theoretical foundations, assumptions about economic expansion, and the portrayal of northern settlements as passive participants in the broader interaction network.

### 1. Theoretical Limitations

Critics argue that applying the world-system framework, originally developed to describe 15th- and 16th-century European capitalism, to the prehistoric world is problematic. The concept of an institution, formed by fragmented and competitive city-states with little real integration, being capable of exploiting the periphery and organizing large-scale activities at a superregional level, seems unlikely during the middle and late Uruk period (Frangipane 2001). Additionally, it has been contended that the core's ability to dominate interregional interactions is overstated, as archaeological evidence points to largely autonomous relationships and minimal exchange between Mesopotamians and indigenous communities. In light of this, the "distance-parity" and "trade-diaspora" models which emphasize different forms and degrees of power exercised by the cores, peripheries, and trade-diasporas may offer a more suitable framework for understanding long-distance exchange in Mesopotamia than the Uruk World System (Stein 1999).

### 2. Questionable Expansion Drivers

The role of economic demand in driving the Uruk Expansion remains debated. A widespread communication network was already in place during the Ubaid period, making it difficult to distinguish between the southern traditions introduced to northern communities around the 6th millennium BCE and those brought by the Uruk Expansion some 2,000 years later (Frangipane 2002). Some scholars suggest that trade may not have been a critical factor, as evidence shows little technological or productivity differences between Uruk and northern settlements (Frangipane 2001). Latest instrumental neutron activation analysis on potteries also shows that long-distance transport of ceramic vessels was rare during the late Uruk period, suggesting the expansion may not have been closely connected through regular exchange (Emberling and Minc 2016). An alternative hypothesis posits that the occupation of certain northern sites, such as Habuba, may have been driven by migration rather than economic factors, as the large population present seems excessive for the sole purpose of controlling trade routes. (Schwartz 2001).

### 3. Reevaluating the North

The traditional view, which depicted northern settlements as "less developed and peripheral" to the south, has been reevaluated with new archaeological evidence. For instance, there is ongoing debate about whether northern cities should be seen as passive peripheries or active agents during the Uruk period, given that residents in Uruk enclaves were consuming their own resources rather than relying on provisioning from other sites (Stein 2002). Additionally, latest excavations at Tepe Gawra (Ur 2010), Tell Brak (Oates et al. 2007) and Arslantepe (Frangipane 2001) have uncovered large

structures and workshops in layers dating to the late 5th and early 4th millennia BCE. This evidence of complex societies predating the Uruk Expansion argues against a passive status of the north society in the regional interaction.

Despite the limitations of the Uruk World System, no alternative theory has yet accounted for the full range of evidence (Wright 2001). The presence of Uruk-period affiliations in northern settlements, as outlined by the Uruk World System, is well-established.

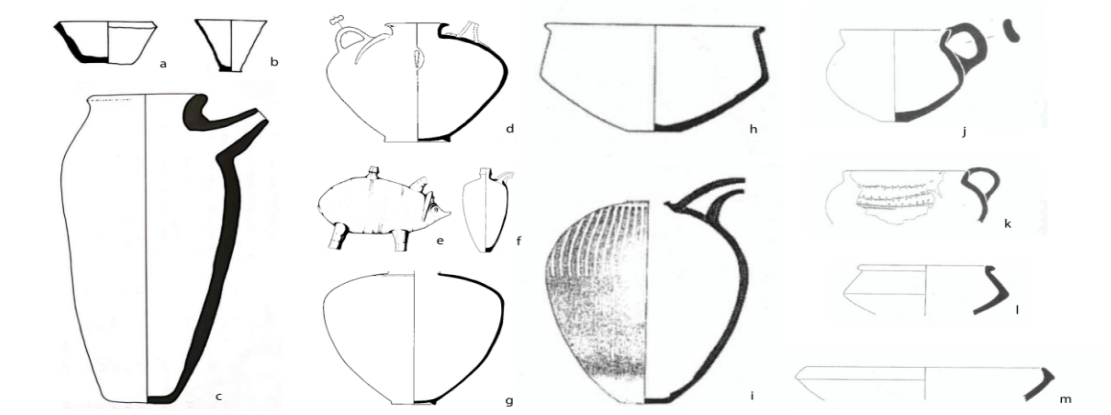
### Ceramic Typology Studies

To date, the Uruk Expansion phenomenon and Algaze’s framework have inspired numerous archaeological research into Uruk-related artifacts, with the typological analysis of pottery playing a central role. These studies provide valuable insights for regional comparisons and contribute to the evaluation of the Uruk Expansion (Helwing 1999). The table below lists key sites with detailed ceramic typological analyses published.

**Table 1: Main Uruk Related Sites and Ceramic Typology Publishes**

Main Sites	Category	Main Ceramic Typology Publishes
Uruk-Warka	Core	Nissen 1970; Sürenhagen 1986; Adams 1981
Habuba Kabira-Süd	Enclave	Strommenger et al. 2014
Jebel Aruda	Enclave	Van Driel+ and Van Driel-Murray 2023
Tell Brak	Enclave	Fielden 1977; Fielden 1981; Oates 1985
Nineveh	Enclave	Thompson and Mallowan 1933; Collon and Reade 1983
Hassek Höyük	Station	Behm-Blancke et al. 1984
Tell Ramadi	Station	Geyer and Monchambert 1987
Godin Tepe	Outpost	Gopnik and Rothman 2018
Hacinebi	Outpost	Pollock and Coursey 1996; Pearce 1999
El-Kown 2	Outpost	Cauvin and Stordeur 1985

This literature review focuses on four specific sites—Uruk-Warka, Jebel Aruda, Hassek Höyük, and Hacinebi—which represent the four types of sites defined in the Uruk World System: heartland (core), enclave, station, and outpost, respectively. By examining the ceramic evidence from these sites, this study explores the diverse forms of cultural transmission in the Syro-Mesopotamian region and investigates broader socio-economic interactions during the Uruk Expansion.



**Figure 1:** *Selected ceramics from Uruk-Warka (a-c), Jebel Aruda (d-g), Hassek Höyük (h-i), and Hacinebi (j-m) (not to scale).*

### 1. Uruk-Warka (Core)

In the heartland of southern Mesopotamia, despite Uruk's significant importance, typological studies have not been fully developed due to its neglect in the early excavations led by architectural historians. Detailed ceramic studies from Uruk-Warka and surrounding areas in southern Mesopotamia were sparse, with key work done by Henry Hissen (Nissen 1970), Dietrich Sürenhagen (Sürenhagen 1986) and Robert McCormick Adams (Adams 1981).

Nissen documented approximately 6,000 ceramic sherds dating from Uruk IV to Early Dynastic I period, of which 80% consisted of mass-produced types, including handmade beveled-rim bowls (BRBs) (Fig.1a) and wheel-made flowerpots (BTs) (Fig.1b). Among these, 1,520 sherds of BRBs were found in older stratigraphic layers. These bowls, though made of coarse material, exhibit remarkable uniformity in form and volume. While other interpretations, such as their use as votive vessels or bread-making tools, have been proposed, their uniformity suggests they were ration vessels. Similarly, Sürenhagen analyzed ceramics from layers XVI-VI in the Eanna district. His work combined two classification methods, examining shapes, coatings, surface treatments, manufacturing techniques, material composition, and firing processes. Surface surveys by Adams revealed that pottery assemblages in the Uruk-Warka region were dominated by simple straight-rim jars, BRBs, spouted vessels (Fig.1c), large strap handles, and clay sickles. These items often featured dark green or gray bodies tempered with fine rounded sand and coarse crushed rock.

### 2. Jebel Aruda (Enclave)

Jebel Aruda, classified as an Uruk enclave, stands as a prime example of the cultural and material influence of Uruk traditions on northern settlements during the Uruk Expansion. The site showcases a full repertoire of Uruk-style vessels and rich material evidence. Recent studies, including a 2023 publication honoring the late Govert Van Driel, offer the most extensive ceramic typology for the site (Van Driel+ and Van Driel-Murray 2023).

The assemblage includes 44 pottery categories, many of which closely align with finds from Habuba Kabira-South. Among the notable ceramics are the highly polished, deep red vessels classified as Uruk Red Ware (Catalogue 14, Fig.1d), narrow-based elongated bottles with curved spouts (Catalogue 26, Fig.1f), and large storage jars featuring decorative false spouts and rivets (Catalogue 28, Fig.1g). Unique to Jebel Aruda are wheel-thrown hedgehog vessels (Catalogue 43, Fig.1e), which add a distinct local flair to the ceramic repertoire. Diatom analysis reveals that the Uruk Red Wares were likely imported from southern Mesopotamia, reflecting direct cultural transmission. In contrast, Catalogue 28 vessels appear to be locally produced imitations crafted with indigenous "common ware", illustrating adaptive responses to Uruk styles. This combination of direct cultural transmission and localized adaptation highlights the dynamic interactions between the Uruk heartland and its enclaves.

### 3. Hassek Höyük (Station)

Hassek Höyük represents a smaller Uruk-related settlement in the Syro-Mesopotamian region. Ceramic analyses highlight parallels with pottery from Habuba Kabira-South (Behm-Blancke and Robert 1984) while also emphasizing Hassek Höyük's distinct local traditions. The site yielded mass-produced BRBs, flowerpots, and their variants (GBTs), along with distinctive pottery forms including bottles with curved spouts, four-eyelet handle pots, and ovoid storage vessels. Many of these closely parallel southern Mesopotamian pottery, highlighting a shared cultural framework. High-value artifacts, including relief-decorated bottles and fragments of Anatolian-style black-polished ware, further point to the site's role as a station for cultural and economic exchange.

One distinctive feature of Hassek Höyük's material culture is the hybrid pottery discovered at the site (Helwing 1999), demonstrating the fusion of local and Uruk traditions. Local shapes were frequently crafted using Uruk technology (Fig.1h), such as fast-wheel production, while Uruk forms were replicated using locally available materials (Fig.1i). This duality likely reflects intentional imitation to display cultural affiliation with the Uruk heartland, coupled with local innovations to improve craftsmanship through techniques adopted from the south. This dynamic interplay underscores the site's integration into broader Uruk networks while preserving its regional cultural identity.

#### 4. Hacinebi (Outpost)

Hacinebi, identified as a potential Uruk outpost, offers an interesting case of cultural interaction between northern and southern traditions. Pollock and Coursey (1996) conducted a detailed examination of Late Chalcolithic pottery at Hacinebi, uncovering a clear dichotomy between northern chaff-tempered ceramics and southern grit-tempered ceramics.

The local wares were characterized by handmade, vegetal-tempered pottery forms, including large hammerhead bowls (Fig.1m) and carinated casseroles (Fig.1l), indicative of indigenous manufacturing traditions. In contrast, 11 types of Uruk-style ceramics were found in a specific northern area of the phase B2 settlement, separate from local ceramics which were mainly concentrated in the southern and western areas. These Uruk-style ceramics show parallels with both local and southern Mesopotamian traditions, suggesting they were not direct imports but instead hybrid forms blending local and Uruk styles. The spatial separation of ceramic types raises questions about the nature of interactions at the site, challenging the colonial interpretation offered by the Uruk World System. Moreover, differences in the size and shape of the pottery highlight further cultural distinctions. Local cooks appear to have favored larger, open casseroles for communal meal preparation, while those using smaller, globular Uruk cooking vessels (Fig.1j, 1k) seemed to prepare meals for smaller groups. This difference is potentially tied to varying social or dietary customs (Pearce 1999). The spatial distribution and morphological differences in pottery reveal the complexity of cultural interactions at Hacinebi.

#### **Research Gaps and Objectives of the Study**

Despite the wealth of research on Uruk pottery, a significant gap remains in comparing pottery assemblages across sites of same functional roles under the Uruk World System. Stratified and detailed site-to-site statistical comparisons are notably lacking.

Regional comparisons have been conducted at numerous sites, such as Hacinebi and Hassek Höyük, as discussed earlier. However, these studies often face three main issues: (1) they tend to be overly general or focus selectively on Uruk-related ceramics without considering the entire pottery assemblage, (2) they lack statistical analysis, and (3) their criteria for selecting comparative objects are unclear, resulting in arbitrary comparisons. Limited attention has been given to detailed, site-to-site comparisons examining how local and Uruk-related ceramics found in enclaves, stations, or outposts differ and share similarities. This oversight prevents a micro-level analysis of ceramic corpora across various sites.

Several key questions remain unresolved: (1) Do ceramics exhibit consistent patterns across sites within the same category? (2) How does the frequency distribution of ceramic data vary between sites? (3) Are there any specific ceramic types whose frequencies are statistically significantly different across sites? (4) How do the observed patterns of differences or similarities inform the understanding of settlement functions and dynamics?

This study seeks to address these gaps through a site-to-site comparative typological analysis of pottery, focusing on sites classified within the same categories under the Uruk World System. By employing a stratified and statistical comparative methodology, the research aims to highlight detailed ceramic characteristics from the selected regions and address the aforementioned questions.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review underscores the need for a more nuanced ceramic typology study within the context of the Uruk World System. While the Uruk World System offers a valuable perspective for understanding the Uruk Expansion phenomenon, it requires refinement to better capture the heterogeneity and diversity of interactions reflected in the archaeological record.

By addressing gaps in site-to-site statistical ceramic comparisons, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of interregional cultural interaction during Uruk period. The approach has broader implications for the study of ancient networks by investigating how northern settlements were influenced by southern traditions, how these influences manifested in settlements with differing roles, and how these variations reflect broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics within the Uruk network.

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