of settlements: enclaves, consisting of one or more larger sites surrounded by smaller villages; stations and outposts, which are smaller, isolated sites with predominantly Uruk material; and sites of outright colonial implantation, in which Uruk colonies wholly supplant the indigenous communities. He maintains that all of these sites are located along or at junctures of important, historically known trade routes and were therefore positioned to control the movement of goods into and out of the alluvial lowlands. Because these settlements are located, in most cases, in regions—and often in the same communities—that contain contemporary settlements with indigenous material culture, Algaze contends that they could not represent territorial expansion or exploitation of agricultural potentials but rather indicate colonization for the sole purpose of exercising control over trade.

Despite the allure of Algaze's formulation, I find some problems with it. First, he has a strong tendency to treat societies as monolithic, homogeneous entities. He argues that society in the alluvial lowlands experienced only benefits from the purported imperial interactions while those in the peripheral highland regions, after some initial positive consequences, felt only negative effects. Such an interpretation leaves no place for intrasocietal factions, politics, and strategic maneuvering. Although detailed data are not yet available, there is every reason to believe that substantial incursions of people of the sort envisioned by Algaze would have encountered quite varied receptions from indigenous peoples in the peripheries. It is by no means clear that alluvial society (or societies) had the power to enforce their projects in the face of significant local resistance.

Algaze also frequently falls prey to the common archeological temptation to assume that "pots equal people." He tends to regard the finding of certain styles of artifacts (including but not limited to pottery) and architecture at a wide array of sites as evidence that "Uruk people" (whoever they were!) moved there. This is certainly one possibility, but it is not the only one. As Algaze himself notes—but does not pursue extensively enough, in my view—people make claims to prestige and power through the acquisition, display, and use of material objects. The assembled evidence does not allow us to rule out the possibility that the presence of Uruk styles of artifacts and architecture outside the alluvial lowlands represents not the movement of people but rather the emulation by locals of a foreign, prestigious style of doing things.

Although I am not convinced by Algaze's argument, I find much of value in this book. In addition to providing the sole comprehensive, up-to-date compilation of data on the Uruk and Late Chalcolithic periods, he directs our attention to the importance of placing our knowledge in a global framework. Algaze's controversial ideas have already stimulated much debate and new research as scholars search for refinements to or alternative interpretations of the Late Uruk "phenomenon."

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