TRAVAS: Theorizing Resilience and Vulnerability in Ancient Studies
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Resilience and Migration: Time for Changing the Paradigm for Archaeologists?

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Introduction

In the social sciences, there are different narratives of migration. In archaeology, however, this theme is conventionally tackled in many cases from within an old-fashioned traditional framework. Accordingly, some scholars consider it a mono-factorial approach that overlooks the complexity and diversity of other factors at play. Others ignore it, not wishing to be regarded as anachronistic scholars or as being trapped in culture-historical or diffusionist paradigms. In this short essay, I discuss migration in the context of social resilience by adopting approaches from human geography, such as translocality. I argue that this approach will be more promising in the context of migration in anthropological archaeology.

The notion of resilience in this essay

For a long time, the definition of resilience was "based on the engineering conception of resilience which focuses on the resistance of a system to shocks and the speed of its return or 'bounce-back' to a pre-shock state or equilibrium. The faster the system returns to equilibrium, the more resilient it is" (Bristow & Healy 2014: 924). The other perspective acknowledges resilience as a "multidimensional property embracing not only *recovery* from the shock and *resistance* (the ability of regions to resist disruptive shocks in the first place), but also *re-orientation* (the extent to which the region adapts its economic structure), and finally *renewal* (the degree to which the region resumes the growth path that characterized its economy prior to the shock" (Bristow & Healy 2014: 924). Holling and Gunderson distinguish these two perspectives as "engineering resilience" for the former and "ecological resilience" for the latter (Holling & Gunderson 2002). Ecological resilience "relates to the functioning of the system, rather than the stability of its component populations, or even the ability to maintain a steady ecological state" (Adger 2000: 349). Later, another group of scholars criticized the "evolutionary economic geography" and "complex adaptive system," claiming that they neglected the role of human agency in this process (Bristow & Healy 2014). However, in Martin and Sunley's article (Martin & Sunley 2007), one can see that they addressed human agents to a certain degree but in a different context.

Resilience is not limited to one strategy or approach, nor does it occur as a short- term event. In my understanding, resilience should rather be conceptualized as a long-term process with different cycles of events and should be studied in longue durée. Archaeology has the potential to address this issue by providing the "episodical patterns" of resilience at different "temporal or spatial scales". Accordingly, resilience is not limited to one variable or proxy; it is a kind of assemblage, and "must be inferred from a number of variables or indicators" (Wilson & Wilson 2019: 128), when we want to talk about the resilience of a community, system or unit. Using the concept of an "organic[1] machine" as a metaphor for resilience may enable us to better

[1] Here, by organic I mean consisting of different parts that are all connected to each other.

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understand it as an assemblage (Fig. 1). This does not mean the mechanisms of resilience are fixed or pre-given. This machine is activated and mobilized by the agency of actors and composed of distinct elements. These elements in their constellation and the human as an active agent and their interplay could define the tempo, pace, and direction of the resilience. In this "organic machine", the reciprocal interplay among variables create an act of motion or resilience. It aptly designates that resilience is a dynamic process and has a strong behavioral element (Bristow & Healy, 2014: 928). This metaphor is not intended to designate or envisage the operationalize process but to highlight the importance of the interplay/relation among different agents in their context (cultural, geographical, economic, or political).

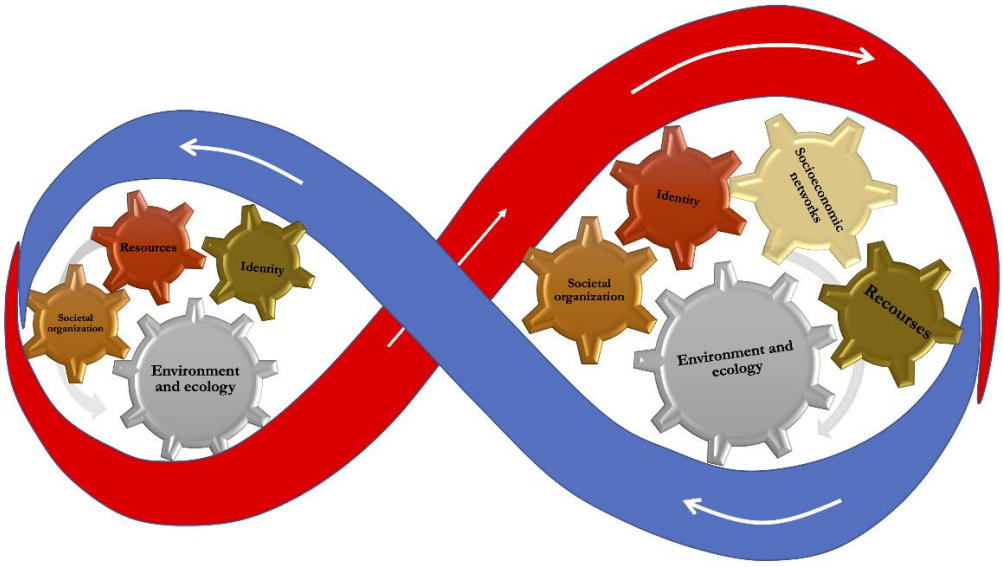

Fig.1: Resilience machine (© Maziar).

Resilience and migration

Migration has been approached in various ways by different disciplines. For instance, Sakdapolrak et al. (2016), in their review of migration studies, recognized different narratives of migration. These narratives in other social sciences (such as human geography) or international organizations (such as UNFCCC, IOM, UNHCR) have perfect matches in archaeological studies. Generally, migration is addressed within two primary contexts: "vulnerability" and "adaptation". In the context of "vulnerability", migration is considered to be an outcome of failing mitigation strategies. In this context, migration will be framed in cause-effect models (push and pull factor), and migrants will be comprehended, for instance, as environmental/climate refugee communities (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016), or as "helpless victims of a train of climatic circumstances" (Yoffee 2010: 199). This viewpoint is widespread among archaeologists. 'Adaptation' (migration as adaptation/for adaptation) is the

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other prevailing narrative among social sciences, as well as in archaeological case studies. In this framework, scholars "acknowledge the potential benefits of migration"; nevertheless, it "lack(s) other dimensions of connectedness" (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016: 84). All of these narratives fail to recognize and comprehend the full complexity of migration. Peter van Dommelen, in his introduction to "Moving on Archaeological perspectives on Mobility and Migration" (2016: 480), asserted that "an archaeological understanding of migration as a 'multilayered process' is practically non-existent". Against this backdrop, Sakdapolrak et al. (2016: 83) propose a new concept, "translocal social resilience as a 'critical analytical framework to create a comprehensive understanding of migration in the context of the environment and climate change'" (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016: 83).

I propose that this analytical framework, based on social-ecological resilience (Folke 2006; Folke et al. 2010), would provide a fruitful basis for archaeological interpretation in the context of migration. "Migration is a messy process as numerous movements by small and autonomous social groups blur social boundaries, alter local trajectories, and complicate elegant evolutionary schemes" (Clark et al. 2013: 400). In this context, migration will not be reduced to "a sign of failure of the local adaptive capacity" and will not be considered as "(solely) a crisis"; rather, it pinpoints the "multi-dimensionality and the potential merits of migration". In the following, addressing one of the Early Bronze Age migrant communities as a case study, I will highlight the promising aspect of resilience theory and "translocal social resilience".

Case study: The Kura-Araxes cultural tradition

The so-called Kura-Araxes cultural tradition (ca. 3500–2450 BCE) is understood by scholars to be one of the most widespread archaeological phenomena in southwest Asian prehistory, spanning from the Caucasus to the southern Levant. The material culture associated with it first emerged in the highlands of the southern Caucasus in the mid 4th millennium BCE. By the early 3rd millennium BCE, it had expanded beyond the southern Caucasus, which is considered to be its region of origin. The Kura-Araxes "diaspora" communities appeared in parts of present-day Iran and eastern Anatolia, as far as the southern Levant. The lack of formation phase for this tradition (KAI) in the host areas and the establishment of new Kura-Araxes settlements (at least around 300 sites in Iran) with their more or less homogenous cultural package (for instance, architecture, pottery, andirons) are a partial reason for considering this expansion as a "migration"[2].

[2] For more evidence and discussion see Maziar in press.

We do not yet know if the Kura-Araxes migration was a "response to reduced resilience within a community or region" case or if it happened as a "cause of increased vulnerability" (Wilson & Wilson 2019: 137), or had other triggers. Many scholars interpreted this migration as "climate change-induced displacement". In most of the related publications, their migration is considered to be merely a direct reaction of groups of people to some

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stresses/disturbances, and the Kura-Araxes groups were envisaged as "environmental refugees" (Burney & Lang 1971), or conflict refugees fleeing a threat (Kohl 2007). Some scholars treated their migration as a simple movement of people from point A to B or, in the best case, as the waves of movements between these points. There is, however, no mention of the other aspects and outcomes of this phenomenon either for the homeland or diaspora. We do not know about the relationship between migrants and those left behind in the homeland, the effects of the migration on the migrants' place of origin, and their connectedness. In other words, what is neglected in all of these studies is the fact that "migration processes involve those left behind" (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016: 84), especially in the case of the Kura-Araxes groups where we have the continuation of occupation in the homeland after the migration phase. In this regard, addressing this migration in the framework of social-ecological resilience will be very promising.

Reframing the Kura-Araxes migration inside the 'adaptive cycle' will broaden our perspective and scope for a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon (Fig. 2). I hypothesize that, either due to some unknown disturbances in the homeland or the opportunities provided in the neighborhood of these communities, parts of the Kura-Araxes groups migrated to their neighboring areas at the end of the 4th millennium BCE. Parts of the society remained within the same system in the homeland (as we can see the continuation of habitation in the homeland), and parts of the Kura-Araxes groups reordered and reorganized and decided to migrate to other neighboring areas (Maziar in press). Later, at the beginning of the 3rd millennium (KA II), they proceeded to the *r* phase, expanded along a vast area, and lived there until the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE. At the end of phase II, around 2700/2600 BCE (KA III), some KA II sites were abandoned, and some new sites were established. During this phase, the Kura-Araxes cultural tradition went to the conservative phase of *K*, which later, around 2450 BCE, culminated in another omega phase (see the powerpoint). Accordingly, the Kura-Araxes groups' migration was not a chaotic change; rather, it was a transformation "governed by particular dynamics, conditions, and opportunities".

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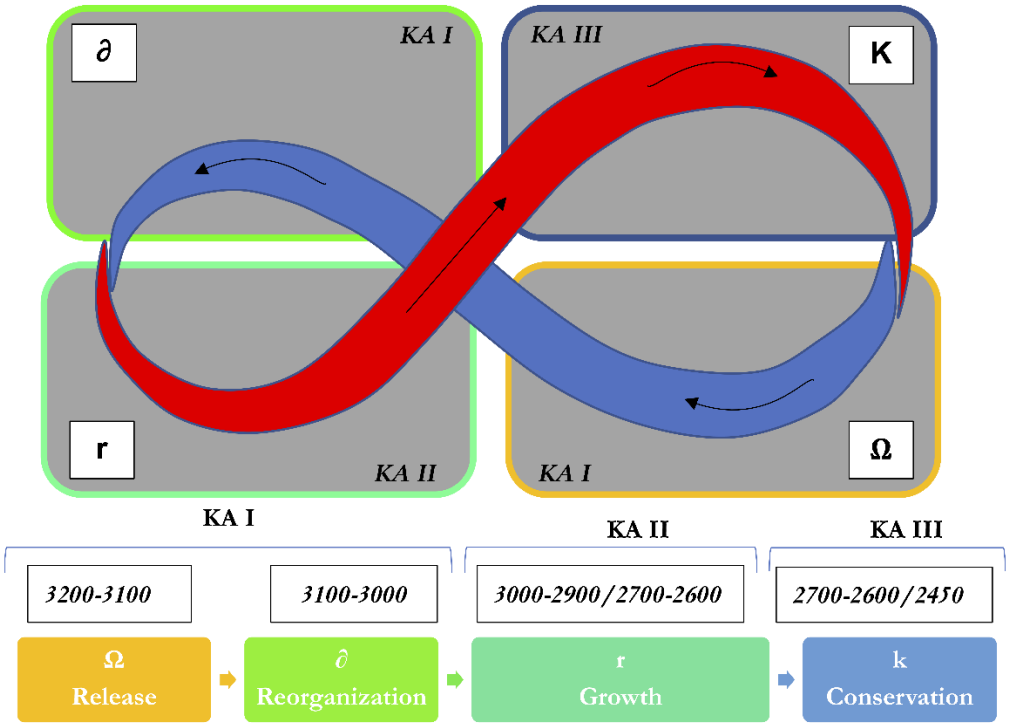

Fig.2: Proposed Adaptive Cycle for the Kura-Araxes cultural tradition (3500-2450 BCE) (© Maziar).

Translocal social resilience in archaeology; changing paradigm?

Within this analytical framework, migration is conceptualized "as a normal aspect of life" with a "complex, multi-causal, non-linear character" (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016: 83). In this context, we do not look for hazardous events, the collapse of something, or conflicts; rather, we acknowledge migration as an intentional strategy for improving conditions. On the other hand, considering "the continuing and enduring links between migrants and their areas of origin" (Sakdapolrak et al. 2016: 88) will add more dimensions that have so far been neglected in the case of the Kura-Araxes culture. In general, this framework exhibits these advantages;

(1) *Multilevel human-environment systems*[3]: Address migration embeddedness in multilevel social, political, ecological contexts. In this case, migration will no longer be considered a "mono-factorial explanation overlooking the complexity and multiplicity of factors at play" (Palumbi 2017: 125).

[3] These aspects are mentioned in Sterly et al. 2016: 63.

(2) *Social practices*: The traditional perspective lacked human practices as a major agent and was entangled in a causal relationship. Within this framework, interrogating the "way they lived" and their "social practices" allows archaeologists to gain a firmer grasp on the community's vulnerabilities and their coping strategies.

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(3) *Translocal connectivity*: The migration is no longer restricted to just the "movement of people," but will be contextualized in their social networks.

Addressing the Kura-Araxes phenomenon within this framework is not straightforward, and there are many challenges. For instance, which variables or parameters should be addressed? What should be our toolkits to tackle this issue? How could we frame the pre-modern entities under translocal social resilience? Even the resilience strategies of the Kura-Araxes cultural tradition, their environmental circumstances, their intimate relationship with their environment and their cultural, social, economic mechanisms are still matters of speculation.

Nevertheless, by taking this framework into account, we could be hopeful of penetrating a little way into the enigmatic world of the Kura-Araxes groups. Migration as an explanation will be considered anachronistic among many archaeologists, diminished once again into "disciplinary shadows". Maybe it is the time for a paradigm change. Applying and borrowing new frameworks and strategies from other disciplines would certainly be of great help in this metamorphosis/transmutation.

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