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Proto-Elamite Communities under the Magnifying Glass

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Introduction

The discovery of so-called "Proto-Elamite" remains across the Iranian plateau during the previous century has given rise to an extensive secondary literature, which attempts to explain this enigmatic archaeological horizon (e.g., Alden 1979; T. Potts 1994; Sumner 1988; 2003). The Proto-Elamite period ranges from ca. 3100 BCE to 2700 BCE. Archaeologists define it by the appearance of Proto-Elamite writing system on clay tablets, the first form of local writing in Iran, in many cases together with specific types of pottery, over a vast geographical territory across the Iranian plateau. The first cylinder seals found in Iran (outside of Khuzestan) come from the Proto-Elamite period as well. During this time Susa, one of the later capitals of the Elamite kingdom, began to show greater influence from the cultures of the Iranian plateau in comparison to the 4th millennium, which was characterized by the Uruk expansion with the appearance of southern Mesopotamian material culture in southwestern Iran and elsewhere.

Scholars who have studied the Proto-Elamite period in a wider geographical area encompassing the whole Iranian plateau, have classified all archaeological phases containing Proto-Elamite material culture as belonging to the "Proto-Elamite civilization". Previous studies on the Proto-Elamite phenomenon (e.g., Lamberg-Karlovsky 1971; 1972; 1978; Alden 1973; 1979; 1982; T. Potts 1994; D. Potts 1999; Sumner 1986; 1988; 2003; Abdi 2003; Alizadeh 2006; 2010) have successfully shed light on various social, economic and even political aspects of this archaeological horizon. These works have devised macro-frames in order to explain the formation processes of this phenomenon and characterizing and interpreting this civilization in very different manners. Some have interpreted the Proto-Elamite horizon as a nomadic civilization with highland roots (Sumner 2003; Alizadeh 2010); some have described it as a trade network with highland origins (Alden 1982), or a low land originated trade network (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1978; 1989; 1996), a fragile polity with ethnic duality (Amiet 1986), a Susiana-based Mesopotamian-influenced culture (T. Potts 1994) and finally as an adoption in the Susiana of Mesopotamian bureaucratic technologies (D. Potts 1999).

These macro-frames imply a set of a priori statements about simultaneous change in different aspects of materialities and social life and thereby have successfully simplified a set of complex and diverse data as a conveniently categorized, bounded and homogenous cultural unit named the "Proto-Elamite" civilization. However, my approach addresses change by starting at a micro-level, to try to identify different practices and their genealogies on this level. In this perspective, there is no consistent evolution

of different aspects of material culture and practices. This archaeological approach to the remnants of everyday life focuses on the scale of domestic practices and local communities and is very well suited to correct the historical biases of concentrating on large-scale political and administrative processes. In addition to studying these communities at a different scale, the inclusion of data from newly examined sites would increasingly contribute to the growing scholarship on community constitution and maintenance processes during the Proto-Elmite horizon. To better understand the nature of this phenomenon there is a need to have a multi-scalar look at this horizon.

In this paper, I demonstrate that the perceived uniformity of the Proto-Elamite horizon in different settlements is only superficial. Due to the variations in the types and intensities of daily practices and the pattern of presumed domestic space usage, certainly social practices involved in creating and maintaining the Proto-Elamite communities were far from homogenous. I argue that new social practices during this period such as inscribing tablets and using seals most probably originated from the individual intentions of certain social agents but also and at the same time shaped the habitus of these societies. These administrative practices had varied longevity in different settlements, and therefore the degree to which they were influential in shaping the general social habitus varied in different communities.

Domestic practices are important loci for investigating the process of community constitution (e.g,. Kolb and Snead 1997; Canuto and Yaeger 2000; Isbell 2000). The overall patterns of practices in different neighborhoods or local communities within different sites, along with the nature and intensity of daily practices, can yield valuable information about the process of local community constitution. In order to study this process, I have begun with the results of performed recursive practices (i.e., from the particular) in order to infer the general pattern (i.e., the social disposition). The study presented here is only a very short glimpse of some examples of discernible differences and variety of practices performed in these settlements during this specific archaeological horizon.

Excavations in settlements containing Proto-Elamite levels have been conducted across a span of 80 years (from the 1930s to the 2000s). Therefore, depending on the current archaeological trends, excavators' questions, as well as the excavation techniques, different aspects of material culture have received varied levels of attention and the archaeological remains have only partially been recovered and/or reported in the publications in a similar and consistent manner. Here, I explore domestic practices at few specific Proto-Elamite sites. The sites included in this manuscript have been excavated more intensively than the others and a minimum level of information of their excavated material is accessible through publications. These settlements include Susa, ABC and TUV operations in Malyan, Tappeh Yahya and Tappeh Hesār. I have also identified at least two comparable domestic contexts within each of these sites. The kitchen context yields the most concentrated evidence for preparing and cooking food. The other context is a general living or socializing area. The reasons why a specific context has been identified as a general living/socializing area differs in each settlement. I analyze these qualifications separately at each site. The function of these two contexts serves some of the very basic human needs and therefore there is a great chance that both or at least one of these contexts can be identified in excavated domestic quarters inside these settlements. Before examining these domestic practices, I turn into tablets as the most well-known characteristic of this phase along with some ceramic types that have been interpreted as the Proto-Elamite "type fossils".

The enigma of the Proto-Elamite tablets

The practice of using tablets appears to be correlated with very different sets of practices in each settlement. This variation exists even in different sections or neighborhoods of one settlement. For example, in the Acropole section of Susa tablets have been found in a building where domestic practices such as food processing, food consumption and household-level thread spinning were performed. The residents of this building were also involved in fishing, hunting and harvesting grain. A different set of tablets in an adjacent indoor space appears to have been related to the trade of dairy products probably received from the mobile herding communities living in the surrounding areas. In the Ville Royale area tablets were found in a potential workshop context that lacked any sign of domestic practices. Inside this structure textiles were dyed and then shipped to the buyers.

In the TUV neighborhood of Malyan (level II) tablets were recovered from two indoor spaces. One of these rooms had special painted plaster decorations and was kept very clean. The other room had a high concentration of trash composed of mostly animal bones and was possibly a meat-processing facility. Two outdoor trash piles and one pit also contained tablets. Similar to this specific level, in other levels tablets were always co-present with sherds of mass-produced Proto-Elamite ceramics including beveled-rim bowls, goblets and trays. This might mean that tablets were mostly used in relation to distributing or serving food/rations among TUV occupants.

In Tappeh Yahya tablets were made and used in a context of daily subsistence practices. The content of these tablets also discusses subsistence practices, such as agricultural and animal products confined to the local level of the settlement. The tablets were mainly stored and used in indoor spaces: their presence in outdoor areas appears to have been an exceptional but possibly intentional activity of some residents.

The very limited information about the Proto-Elamite tablets in Hesār demonstrates that these tablets were used and kept in an indoor space separated from the facilities where daily domestic practices were performed. The tablets and tablet fragments were co-present with by-products of metallurgical activities and stylized anthropomorphic figurines.

I argue that inscribing tablets and using seals originated as social practices outside the pre-existing social dispositions on the Iranian highlands. Nonetheless their intensity in shaping the habitus upon their adoption varied in different communities. Indeed, there was a dialectical relationship between the agencies with the intention to perform management practices and the general social dispositions. The reason why the practice of inscribing tablets did not continue to be performed in all these settlements after a few hundred years may be that a specific sector of the community brought this particular practice into existence rather than the general social disposition of these societies necessitating the performance of this practice. Because of this fact, at the time when this sector lost its influence on the social order due to multiple reasons including losing authority, old age, death, movement and change of ideology, these management practices stopped to be performed. In other words, the creation and usage of these tablets were possibly the result of an isolated attempt of a small emerging elite group rather than a logical outcome of the interaction among different elements of the social structures of these settlements.

Due to all of the existing variations in relation to the usage of tablets it can be inferred that despite some similarities, such as the presence of the tablets in contexts related to storage activities and mostly in indoor spaces, social practices involved in creating, inscribing and using tablets were far from homogenous

in different sites containing Proto-Elamite material culture. Apart from the fact that the different nature and intensity of daily practices conducted in each neighborhood exhibited various processes of local community constitution, different signatures of administrative practices demonstrate the independent and unique nature of local communities during the Proto-Elamite horizon. Except for Susa and Malyan, the scale of the recorded transactions on tablets does not go beyond the local economy. Furthermore, none of these settlements including Susa and Malyan, which seem to have relied on tablet inscription more than the other settlements, collapsed after the disappearance of the tablets and their life continued into the later periods. It is plausible to think that displaying the social meanings and connotations of a status marker was among the social and political roles that tablets and the practice of making and inscribing them played. Making and using similar material culture gave specific sectors of the Proto-Elamite settlements a face of an imagined community (Anderson 1991), but one that was far from a fully integrated and synchronized entity. Making and inscribing tablets were powerful means that facilitated the formation process of an imagined community that was part of and incorporated in the larger local communities during this time, when every person who had the means and knowledge of making and using tablets imagined her/himself as being part of a larger metropolitan community and culture.

The attempts toward creating and sustaining an imagined community that inscribed records of transactions on tablets ceased on the Iranian plateau after ca. 200 hundred years. No written tablet has been recovered from the plateau during the following 800 years (Dahl 2009). After the disappearance of the tablets, for some reason agents were not encouraged to use tablets to keep track of commodities or labor or to mark themselves as different through doing so. The community members utilized other means and material objects to mark their social difference with others.

Ceramics as other Proto-Elamite "type fossils"

Beside tablets and seals, other "type fossils" including beveled-rim bowls, low-sided trays and pedestal-based goblets, traditionally regarded as belonging to the Proto-Elamite culture, can be viewed as the other constituent elements of this archaeological horizon. None of these artifacts are continuously and homogenously present in settlements encompassing the Proto-Elamite culture. For example, there is no clear or secure evidence that pedestal-based goblets were made and used in Yahya (Mutin and Lamberg-Karlovsky 2014, 70). In contrast to this situation goblets have been recognized as the exclusive indicator of the Proto-Elamite horizon in Malyan (Alden 2013, 218).

The ceramic assemblage of the Proto-Elamite levels in the two districts of Susa (excavated with modern methods) is quite different. Common ceramic wares of the Proto-Elamite horizon in Ville Royale I do not consist of the known Proto-Elamite "type fossils" such as goblets and trays, although these types do occur. More common ceramic forms include "*shallow and hemispherical bowls, sometimes with notched rims, and neckless jars that grade into closely related open forms. Small jars that are rarely decorated with red and black paint, but more frequently with simple bands of red paint, and medium to large necked jars with flat-topped rims are also characteristic of these levels*" (Carter 1978, 202; and see also Carter 1979, 453; 1980, 16–18). The most common ware in Ville Royale is unslipped or self-slipped and fired to a buff or rosy-buff color. This ware makes up over half of the diagnostic sherds and is used for small to medium cups and bowls (Carter 1980, 16–17). Dittmann relates the low frequency of goblets and low-sided trays in Ville Royale I to possible functional

differences between the structures in Ville Royale and Acropole I (Dittmann 1986, 174–75).

On the other hand, the most common ceramic forms in the Proto-Elamite horizon of Acropole I include the specific forms considered to be Proto-Elamite "type fossils". These include goblets and coarse plates/basins/vats with everted body and rounded rims (Le Brun 1971, 192). These basins increase in popularity from level 16 to level 14B. The most common ware in Acropole I has a pinkish surface with a dark gray section, including a small amount of vegetal temper. This type of ceramic is usually not baked evenly and therefore the core is not oxidized (Le Brun 1971, 92–194).

Based on these observations we can conclude that ceramics in the Acropole district were produced at a faster pace and mass-produced on a larger scale. Apart from these differences, the two districts share certain qualities based only on presence and absence of certain types of material culture elements. This does not take into consideration the intensity of their presence. **Table 1** demonstrates the comparative occurrence of the most diagnostic ceramic types, along with Proto-Elamite tablets, in the Proto-Elamite levels of Acropole I and Ville Royale I in Susa as well as the other settlements.

On the other hand, the ceramic profile of both TUV and ABC areas in Malyan are quite similar with coarse straw tempered goblets, trays, and beveled-rim bowls composing the majority of the ceramics, and grit tempered open and closed forms composing the rest. However beveled-rim bowls were less frequently used and/or discarded in the ABC section. According to Alden (2013, 216–18) the mass-produced trays and beveled-rim bowls started to be made during the earlier Early Banesh period in the Kur River Basin, and the only ceramic form that exclusively characterized the Middle Banesh period (Proto-Elamite) were chaff-tempered goblets with pedestal bases and concave rims. The coherent and limited ceramic assemblage in both areas suggests a narrow range of activities involving ceramics, including those for food processing or consumption, as well as storage.

Due to the reason that only one structure from the Proto-Elamite horizon has been excavated in Tappeh Yahya, our picture of the characteristics of this horizon is partial at best. No comprehensive quantitative record has been kept from the excavated material, especially of ceramics and small finds. This fact adds to the ambiguity of our perception. In general, we can say that the Proto-Elamite settlement at Yahya was a largely self-sufficient agricultural village, and its residents also practiced animal husbandry. The ceramic-making tradition, although influenced by the new trends of this horizon, kept some of its local identity as well (Mutin and Lamberg-Karlovsky 2014, 57–143).

During the Proto-Elamite Hesār more than 40% of ceramics consisted of gray ware, and painted ware was largely restricted to buff ware small goblets on stems or small globular bowls with simple decoration around the upper surface consisting of vertical lines between two horizontal lines (Deshayes 1975, Fig. 34:5). The painted vessel forms also included small-sized goblets less than 10 cm high, but mostly consisted of simple globular hole mouth jars and pedestal-based bowls or cups with everted rims and flaring sides (Dyson and Remsen 1989, 102). The burnished gray ceramic forms included: chalice or stemmed bowls, long stemmed vessels and long necked bottle jars or bottle pitchers (Dyson and Remsen 1989, 105). The gray vessels were of medium and large sizes and included pedestal-based goblets as well (16–25 cm in height). This difference in size between burnished gray ware and painted buff ware is probably suggestive of the difference in usage.

Site	Phase	Tablet	Cylinder seal	Beveled-rim bowl	Goblet	Low sided trays	Polychrome/ monochrome Jemdat Nasr jars
Yahya	IVC2	X	X	X	?	X	X
	IVC1		X	X		X	X
Malyan ABC	BL5			X	X	X	
	BL4	X	X	X	X	X	
	BL3	X	X	X	X	X	
	BL 2	X	X	X	X	X	X
Malyan TUV	BL III	X	X	X	X	X	
	BL II	X	X	X	X	X	
	BL I			X	X	X	
Susa Acropole	Level	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Level 15B	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Level 15 A	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Level 14 A	X	X	X	X	X	X
Susa Ville Royale	Level 18B	X	X	X	X	X	X
	18 A		X	X	X	X	X
	17		X	X	X	X	X
	16			X	X	X	
Shahr-e Sukhte I	Phase 10	X	X				
Tol-e Nurabad	A9			X	X		
	A8			X	X		
	A7			X	X		
Tol-e Spid	Leve l 18			X	X	X	
Hesār	Phase II	X	X				
Sialk	Phase IV2	X	X	X		X	X
Arisman	Phase C07-C04		X	X	X	X	X
Sofalin	?	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 1. The presence/absence pattern of Proto-Elamite type fossils in different levels of the settlements investigated in this research.

Given the quantitative data available from the 1976 restudy, it is clear that the gray pottery is already present in a very small quantity in the previous period I. Certainly its usage increased during the final phase, in which painted pottery was still the dominant form (Dyson 1985, 344). Painted pottery remained in use throughout the later periods; larger quantities were present in the occupation levels than in the graves. Both buff and gray wares were a local product (Dyson 1985, 345).

Based on the above observations, ceramic assemblages of Tappeh Hesār show a steady continuity in all periods from the 5th millennium BCE through the 2nd millennium BCE. However, the painted ware continues to be produced in a limited quantity after the end of Hesār I (ca. 3500 BCE). Based on mineralogical studies, as indicated above, the same local clay sources were used to produce pottery in all periods of occupation in Hesār: therefore, the shift in color from red to gray in period II would appear to be due to the general adoption of a reduction firing technique with a change to burnishing largely replacing painting as a decorative technique. The reducing process reflects greater control over the firing atmosphere, enabling the potters to produce a harder ceramic fabric at a lower temperature than that under oxidizing conditions; therefore, the reducing process is more fuel efficient (Pigott et al. 1982, 216–17).

In general, it can be concluded that the continuity of the local wares and absence of large quantities of the typical Proto-Elamite lowland pottery distinguishes Hesār from other sites of the Proto-Elamite horizon: especially from the nearby site on the western edge of the central plateau, Sialk.

Apart from the diverse pattern of the performance of regular daily practices in these sites that will be discussed in the next section, there is a variety in presence/absence as well as frequencies and contexts of tablets, cylinder seals, beveled-rim bowls, goblets, low-sided trays, monochrome and polychrome Jemdet Nasr vessels as specific Proto-Elamite type fossils **Table 1**. The significance of these various assemblages of material cultural originates from the possibility that each of these were made and used through performing different practices. This points to the fact that not all these practices requiring each of these artifacts were performed in every settlement synchronically or even not all these objects were used for the same purposes in every community.

There was a considerable amount of diversity among different types of routine practices performed in settlements discussed here. Although certain practices were shared among all of them, including food preparation, food and drink serving and consumption, socializing, play, cloth production, personal ornamentation, using management tools and storage, the mere existence of material remains that point to these practices does not mean that they were conducted in a similar manner and with the same intensity in all settlements or even in different sections of one settlement. The specific ways of performing these practices were shaped by many local factors and differentiated members of one local community from another (Goldstein 2000; Isbell 2000; Joyce and Hendon 2000; Yaeger 2000). However, it is important to bear in mind that this observation is at least in part a result of which sites, how much of them and how carefully they were excavated, recorded, and reported.

Based on the analysis that is offered below varied patterns of recursive practices as well as the varied distribution and properties of materialities are traceable. This variability existed in different neighborhoods of one settlement as well as among different settlements. The dissimilarity was more intense among different settlements in comparison to different neighborhoods of one settlement,

but its mere existence implies independent and separate trajectories of local community constitution in the Proto-Elamite horizon. Hence it is important to avoid a priori assumptions about the existence of consistent and synchronized patterns of change and repetition in Proto-Elamite societies. Also, specific material culture forms considered being "type fossils" of this horizon were utilized by some community members in different contexts in combination with various other objects. No homogenous pattern is discernible among all these settlements and even among different neighborhoods of one settlement. Therefore, although significant portions of the material culture during this horizon were similar, they were nonetheless incorporated into local communities and their practices in distinct ways.

The next section explores domestic practices at few specific Proto-Elamite sites. These sites have been excavated more intensively than the others. They include: Susa, Malyan, Tappeh Yahya and Tappeh Hesār. In Malyan almost all building levels of both TUV and ABC operations reflect meaningful patterns of the presence of different domestic contexts, but here I have chosen to discuss the building level II in the TUV operation, solely for the sake of brevity.

Domestic practices during the Proto-Elamite horizon in Susa

The great majority of Proto-Elamite tablets have been recovered from the older excavations at Susa and it appears that this settlement was an important node in the Proto-Elamite network. Modern archaeological methods applied to excavations conducted in Susa have been used in the recovery of a very small portion of the site in comparison to its tremendous size (approximately 40 ha). These modern excavations have been conducted to mainly clarify the stratigraphy of the site and help with the dating of the numerous objects recovered from Susa through non-standard 19th and early 20th century excavations. However, it is possible to make a few observations about domestic practices based on this limited data, because by chance both of these stratigraphic excavations in Acropole I (Le Brun 1971) and Ville Royale I (Carter 1980) have been conducted in domestic spaces.

The architectural spaces in Acropole I and Ville Royale I in Susa consist of indoor and outdoor areas. These spaces are smaller than the structures recovered from other Proto-Elamite settlements such as Malyan and Yahya. **Fig. 1** shows building plans of levels 4, 3 and 2 in the ABC Operation of Malyan along with the building level 18 in the Ville Royale section of Susa, drawn at the same scale. The biggest room in both areas of Susa measures around 15 m². These structures consist of multiple rooms, and most of them have their own fire installation. In the open space that separates the two structures in Ville Royale (level 18), at least two fire installations were in use simultaneously for cooking. In addition, sherds of beveled-rim bowls were found along with grinding stone fragments and animal bones in a room that was most likely used for food preparation. This room was located next to one with three ovens (Carter 1980, 14).

Usually a wall surrounds these multi-room structures (e.g., Le Brun 1971, 202), and sometimes piles of trash consisting of ash and bone were dumped behind the walls (e.g., Carter 1980, 14). In general, the architectural structures in both areas of Susa resemble compartmentalized and congested urban neighborhoods with limited space available for expansion.

In Susa, despite other excavated settlements no context can be attributed to mainly the practice of socialization. But a separate room (545) in level 18 in Ville Royale was identified with a burned surface and a kiln built into the co rner. Two glazed steatite seals

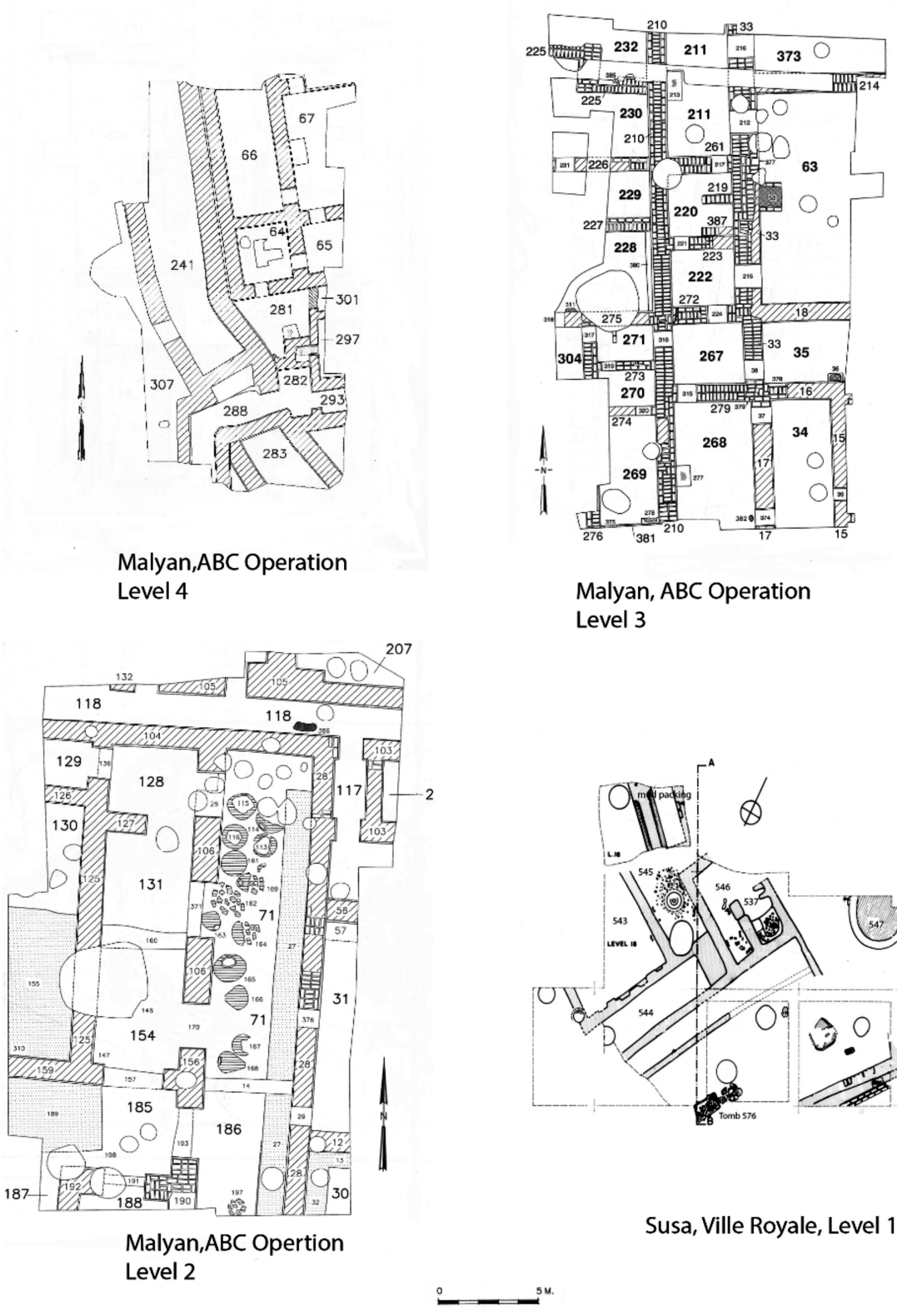

Fig. 1. Plan of building levels 4, 3 and 2 in ABC Malyan in comparison with level 18 in the Ville Royale section of Susa. From, clockwise: Sumner 2003, Figs. 11, 12, 20; Carter 1978, Fig. 39.

and a vat were found in the fill between the two construction phases of this kiln. Also, a large jar was sunk into the floor of this room. Numerous layers of pebbles surrounded this jar lead the excavator to think that it had been used as a water jar. A sealing was found in the pebbles next to it (Carter 1980, 14). This room, along with the features in it, can be related to textile dying practices in Susa. Items related to textile or yarn dying included a kiln used to warm water, a vat, and a large jar sunk into the floor for dipping the fibers in the dye solution. However, the excavator has not mentioned the identification of any remains of dye.

Taking into consideration the excavated volume in Susa in comparison to Proto-Elamite levels in other sites, there is a markedly higher concentration of spindle whorls at Susa. For example, in Acropole I, from approximately 10 cubic meters of excavated soil of levels 16 to 14, at least 12 spindle whorls have been recovered. Another clue to the common textile production practices in Susa during the Proto-Elamite period is the constant increase in the percentage of basins among the ceramic assemblages of these levels. Basins comprise only 3.5% of all ceramics in level 17 of Acropole I. This number increases to 15% during the first Proto-Elamite level (level 16) and eventually to 27% during the final Proto-Elamite levels (levels 14A–13). Given the abundance of various forms of ceramic vessels throughout these levels, along with the relatively large size of these basins, with diameters between 20 and 50 cm, and their coarse ware that is not baked well (Le Brun 1971, Figs. 60:22, 61:11–15, 65:12–19), it is unlikely that basins and vats were used as serving or eating vessels. Therefore, it is plausible to think that these vessels were used for activities such as mixing dyes (for a different context but similar argument see Bernbeck 2010, 74). However, it is also possible that these basins were used in food preparation processes.

Jacob Dahl's study on signs of animal husbandry in Susa's Proto-Elamite tablets have shown that residents of Susa were indirectly engaged in herding practices, and that they closely controlled and kept detailed records of this practice (Dahl 2005). These bookkeeping procedures were sophisticated, suggesting an extensive administrative apparatus. Based on Dahl's detailed analysis of the Susa Proto-Elamite corpus, two sets of documents followed each flock of animals. One set consisted of primary documents (in relation to a single flock), whereas secondary documents (summing up all the primary records) tallied the size of the flocks. Another set, likely made up of both receipts (primary) and accounts (secondary) as well, computed the production of the same flock.

Dahl has only been able to decipher the signs for the young, adult, female, and male sheep, and goat. In some of these tablets female sheep outnumbered the goats, while the opposite proved to be the case in other tablets (Dahl 2005, 101). However, in the specific texts that he has analyzed, in general goats outnumber sheep by far. He interprets this as the probable preference for goat milk products by the Susa administrators. If the mobile herders of the Zagros Mountain were responsible for the herding practices, the prevalence of goats may be related to their adaption for living in mountainous regions and seasonal movements. Dahl has specified a range of animal by-products that Susa residents received from the herders (2005, 113–16). He has deciphered butter-oil and dried cheese as the first and second most important by-products mentioned in the tablets. It is logical to assume that wool and hair were also among these by-products. However, signs signifying these items have not yet been deciphered.

In this complex society, local and surrounding communities incorporating both the settled urban population and the mobile/semi mobile population coexisted as nested and/or cross-cutting entities. However, because neighbors

in Susa shared a common living environment, a series of particular local concerns and the potential for frequent interaction, the local community of Susa was grounded in a way that distinguishes it from the seemingly more fluid communities surrounding it. If we assume such a scenario, the local sedentary communities and the mobile communities who relied more on an imagined commonality (Anderson 1991), each were more strongly founded on a different set of common practices.

A glimpse of domestic practices in the Proto-Elamite Malyan (TUV Operation)

Tall-e Malyan occupies a surface of about 200 ha, bounded by an ancient enclosure wall, and has been identified on epigraphic evidence as being the Elamite city of Anshan during the later periods of its life (Hansman 1972). Unlike the cultural material excavated in association with Proto-Elamite tablets in other sites that is very small, the relatively extensive material excavated in ABC and TUV operations at Malyan adds considerably to this data corpus.

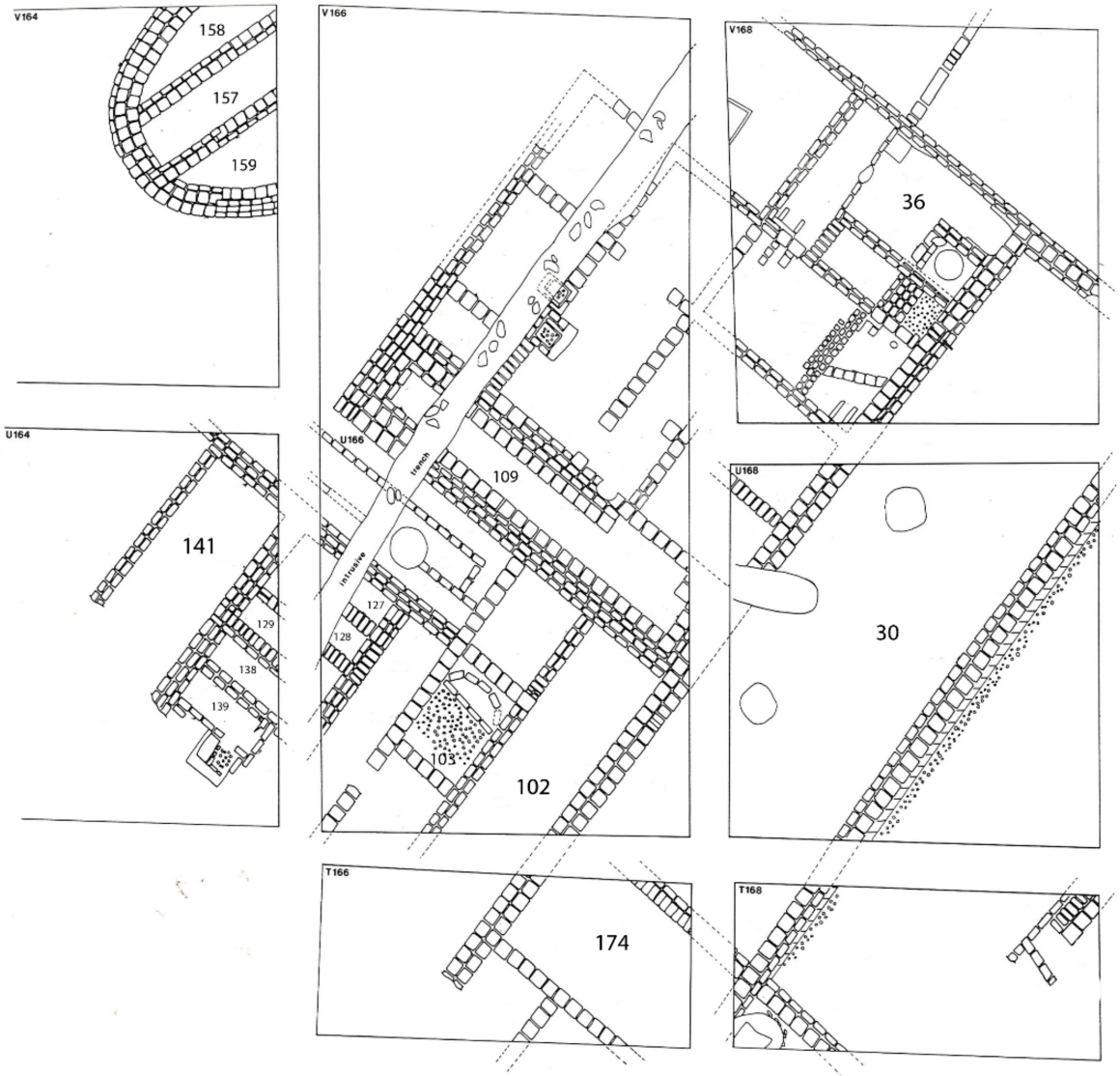

Fig. 2. Malyan, TUV operation, Plan of Building Level II. From Nicholas 1990: Fig. 15.

Here I compare types and intensity of practices in the interior and exterior excavated areas in building level II of the TUV neighborhood as an example among other buildings in Malyan (**Fig. 2**). This building belongs to the Late Middle Banesh phase, circa 2900 BCE (Sumner 2003, 53, Table 12).

At TUV very little artifactual material remained in primary depositional context. Analysis of activities is solely dependent on secondary deposits (Nicholas 1990, 91). The excavator, Ilene Nicholas, has done a detailed analysis of the ubiquity, concentration, and structural position of different activities in each building level.

Food preparation and cooking practices in the TUV neighborhood

The presence of cobble hearths with associated fire-cracked stones, domed ovens, raised box hearths and casual hearths with remains of charcoal suggests that cooking was practiced using a variety of methods, possibly through both direct and indirect application of heat. Although the lack of information regarding the sooting on the ceramic vessels, or ceramic microdebris in fire installations and evidence of burnt bones makes this suggestion tentative.

The co-presence of a high concentration of animal bones with both the excavated cobble hearths (rooms 36 and 32) and a domed oven suggests that meat was cooked using both the hearths and oven, possibly by grilling it on hot rocks.

The two rooms where the cobble hearths are located have the highest concentration of animal bones in the whole building. In contrast, two rooms where in situ mortar and grinding stones have been recovered (rooms 27 and 43) contained no bones and in general had very low concentration of debris. Therefore, it can be inferred that the cooking and processing of meat and grains were carried out in different compartments of the kitchen complex, separate but close to one another. The rooms where grain and plants may have been prepared were kept relatively clean in comparison to the meat processing rooms. It seems that alcove 25 (containing a pit) was a designated dumping area for the rooms that contained in situ grinding stones (rooms 27 and 43), as well as for the neighboring clean rooms which showed very low concentrations of debris (rooms 26 and 45). This pit contained a relatively high concentration of chipped stone tools most likely used for plant processing procedures.

A general living or socializing space in the TUV neighborhood

Right next to the kitchen complex there is a group of seven rooms (rooms 31, 115, 69, 75, 364, 363, 362 and 109) with very few features and very low concentrations of debris inside them (**Fig. 3**). Indeed, only three of these rooms contained non-tertiary deposits and the only features in these rooms were three raised-box hearths. The recovered debris from this complex includes few chipped stones, few sherds of mass-produced ceramics, painted ceramics and storage vessels, a low concentration of animal bones, one copper pin, one spindle whorl and two Proto-Elamite tablets. Since these rooms were kept meticulously clean during the time they were used, the recovered deposits were probably left over from the final days of occupation. In general, the limited serving and consumption of food, chipped stone and cloth production, shell working and the usage of management tools, seem to have taken place in these rooms. The fact that the rooms were clean with few features in them has convinced the excavator to interpret this group of rooms as the "*general living/ entertainment zone*" (Nicholas 1990, 113).

Indoor versus outdoor spaces in the TUV neighborhood

The sheer amount of debris found in outdoor areas of the TUV operation is at least three times the amount of debris recovered from the indoor rooms. The interior debris pattern varies and, except for a pit in the kitchen complex (alcove number 25), there is no tendency towards a regular trash deposit in them. This suggests that the trash from interior spaces dates to the structure's final days of use, and that the debris on exterior surfaces had accumulated over a longer period.

The usage of mass-produced goblets and trays is an activity that stands out among others in the only courtyard of this building (area 30). As the excavator suggests, the usage of these vessels was possibly localized in or near the neighboring room (room 174; Nicholas 1990, 112). After use, the debris of these vessels were disposed in a secondary deposit in the courtyard.

Apart from the courtyard, three other outdoor areas, described by the excavator as "peripheral areas", have been excavated. Due to the rock buttressing piled against the face of a wall separating one of these areas from courtyard 30 (wall 179), it has been thought to be an exterior zone, possibly a street. If it is in fact a street, then this area was kept unusually clean. Only a moderate amount of bone and few sherds (including mass-produced trays and goblets, as well as decorated sherds) have been recovered here. It is plausible that the debris was dumped here as residue from communal feasts performed in the next-door courtyard 30.

The next outdoor area is divided into two sections; one of them (area 47) was paved with cobbles. The total number and diversity of debris fragments deposited in the unpaved area (area 39) was higher than that from the paved area. Area 39 contained a high concentration of animal bones. Since this area is next to room 36 and 32 of the kitchen complex, which are assumed to be specific places for processing and cooking meat, it is possible that part of the trash produced in these rooms was dumped in this area next door.

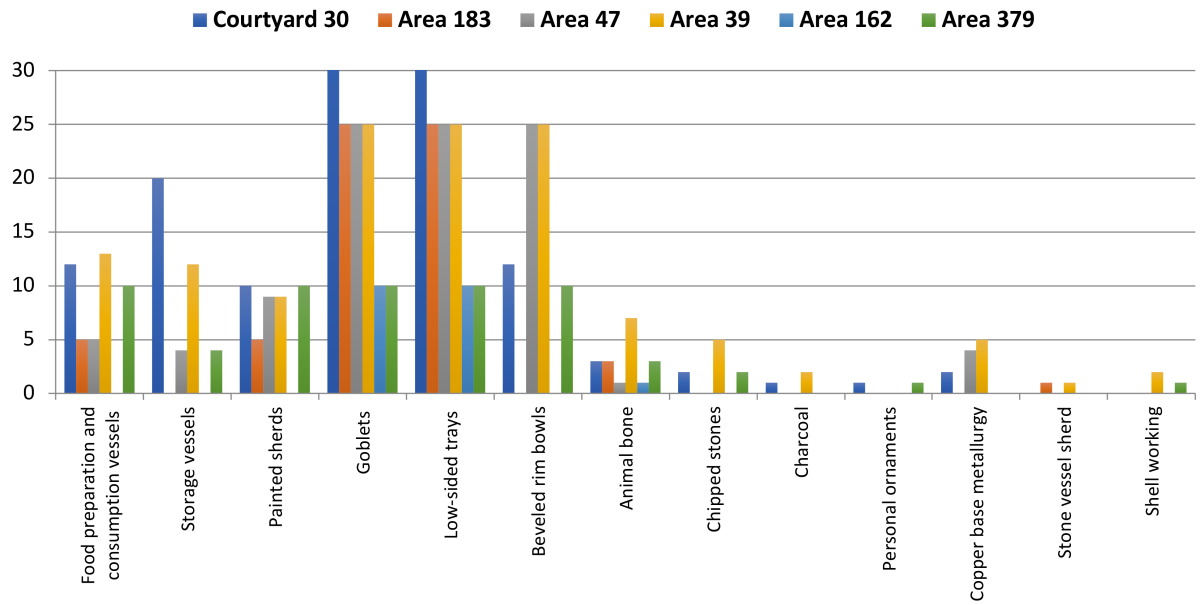

Fig. 3. Distribution of different categories of debris in outdoor areas of building level II in the TUV section of Malyan. (The absolute counts of more than 30 are not shown in the figure in order to make it more readable).

In the northwestern portion of the TUV operation was a freestanding round structure containing three partition rooms. The open area surrounding this structure, as well as the fill inside the structure, contained a mix of trash consisting mostly of goblet and tray sherds.

In general, open areas in TUV except for the main courtyard, were used to dump trash from elsewhere, and no indication of regular practices performed on these surfaces is discernible. This situation would have perhaps been very different if sampling of micro-debris was performed during the time of the excavation.

There are definite forms of evidence supporting the argument that most of food processing, preparation and cooking as well as storage was performed indoors. We also know that public commensality and even household specific daily food serving, and consumption may have been performed in the main courtyard and a neighboring room. This room was located further away from the kitchen complex and the possible general living area. Therefore, guests could enter the room through the courtyard and have been entertained and fed in this room without having to pass through the interior general living area.

The compartmentalization of different areas within the kitchen complex, between the kitchen and the courtyard, as well as the restriction of the courtyard and the building as a whole implies that during this phase the residents of Malyan conceived of their world as comprised of divided segments. This segmentation of the space could have very possibly been extended to class roles, gender roles and the division of labor in general (Kent 1984, 206). Nonetheless it is important to note that these assignments of specific function to separate spaces is heavily influenced by the Western mindset. We do not know if each of these rooms was certainly used for a specific and restricted array of practices. Multiple practices such as rest, play and production could have been performed in one space. However, many of these practices leave few material traces behind.

Domestic practices at Tappeh Yahya during the Proto-Elamite horizon

In this section I will compare types and intensity of practices in interior and exterior areas as well as consider the relation between routinized and exceptional practices inside the Proto-Elamite level of the only building complex excavated at Yahya (**Fig. 4**). Tappeh Yahya is in Southeastern Iran in the southwest corner of a highland valley. Seven seasons of excavation have been conducted in Tappeh Yahya during the summer months of 1968–1971, 1973, and 1976. This site has a long sequence of settlement: some 5000 years from period VII, estimated to occupy the 5th millennium BCE, through the Partho-Sassanian period from 200 BCE to 225 CE.

In the published report from Tappeh Yahya the small find record is as complete as possible, however the ceramic records and drawings represent only a small selection from a vast body of ceramics recovered during the excavation (D. Potts 2001, XLVI; Mutin and Lamberg-Karlovsky 2014). Therefore, it is not possible to perform a statistical analysis on the ceramic data, and our knowledge of ceramics is based mostly on presence and absence.

A kitchen and a socializing space

In the northwestern part of trench A, there is an outdoor area (Area B) with specific features that suggest it might have been a cooking area linked to the main structure of the Proto-Elamite period (**Fig. 4**). In this area a pooling space or a basin constructed of unworked, unbonded stones was discovered, into which the gutter found in the adjacent area (Area A) most likely drained. The corner of a small earthen platform abutted this gutter.

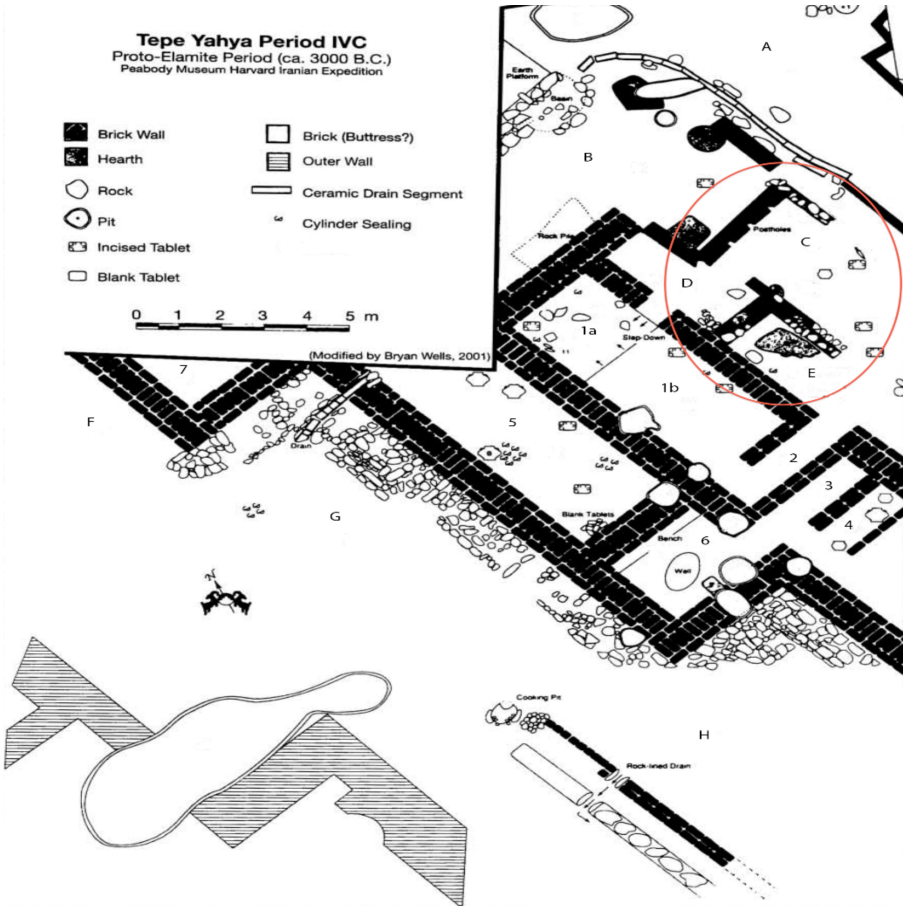

Fig. 4. Tappeh Yahya, Plan of the IVC2 building. After Damerow and Englund 1989, Fig.1.

Just south and west of the gutter, several pits and hearths were discovered. A large pit on the north end of the gutter near the platform could have been used for the disposal of cooking and food preparation debris; the basin might as well have been used for washing and cleaning purposes, the abutting platform facilitating this task. No record of the possible ceramic finds in the basin was included in the final report.

The southern face of one of the mudbrick walls delimiting Area B had an indented exterior, perhaps representing cavities made by wooden poles. This has been interpreted as a shaded area, and Potts writes: *"It is possible that these mark remains of a lean-to of wooden poles and suspended mats intended to provide shade for Area C"* (D. Potts 2001, 9). Despite its small size this area yielded a large quantity of important finds and was comprised of two floors separated by 10–20 cm of fill. A concentration of pottery was found roughly in the middle of the upper floor. This space's proximity to the cooking area (whose temporary roof provided shade), its location just outside the main building's entrance, and the finds recovered all support the interpretation of this area as a socializing and meal-sharing space during the Proto-Elamite horizon.

Small finds recovered from this area mostly consisted of pieces of stone bowls and other stone vessels. Besides management tools such as tablets, sealings and tokens, the next category of relatively high-concentration small finds consists of items used for personal ornamentation. These include a stone bead of undetermined material, a lapis lazuli bead, a turquoise bead, a single shell piece and a copper/bronze pin.

A glimpse on daily practices performed in indoor and outdoor spaces of the Proto-Elamite horizon at Tappeh Yahya

According to the wide range of small find categories in one of the rooms (Room 1) as well as the high density of management tools (including incised tablets, tablet blanks and sealings) in Room 5, it seems that people living in Yahya during the Proto-Elamite horizon used the indoor space for a variety of activities. Such activities included management practices, using stone tools, cloth production, food serving, and some food preparation tasks (**Fig. 5**).

Clay balls have only been found outdoors in the potential socializing space and an adjacent outdoor space (Area A). Stone balls, on the other hand, have only been found indoors. These small balls along with two zoomorphic figurines found in one of the indoor rooms may be indicative of play (for a different case with a similar argument, see Javeri et al. 2010, 197). However, the absence of any detailed description of these items and their use wear makes it hard to solidify this interpretation.

The same number of tools related to cloth production was found both indoors and outdoors. These include a bone needle and clay spindle whorl recovered outdoors and a bone awl and clay spindle whorl recovered indoors.

Food-processing tools including four mortars were recovered from Room 1. Room 1 is directly connected to the outdoor socializing space and indirectly to the cooking space. No fire installations have been reported from this room.

The only indoor hearth is reported in Room 6 with a bench facing the hearth from the other side of the room. Only three sherds and four small finds (a bead, a chlorite sherd, a piece of white stone and a stone ball) have been reported from this room. This points to the fact that this room was kept relatively clean. This room had direct access to the storage magazines, but was separated from Room 1

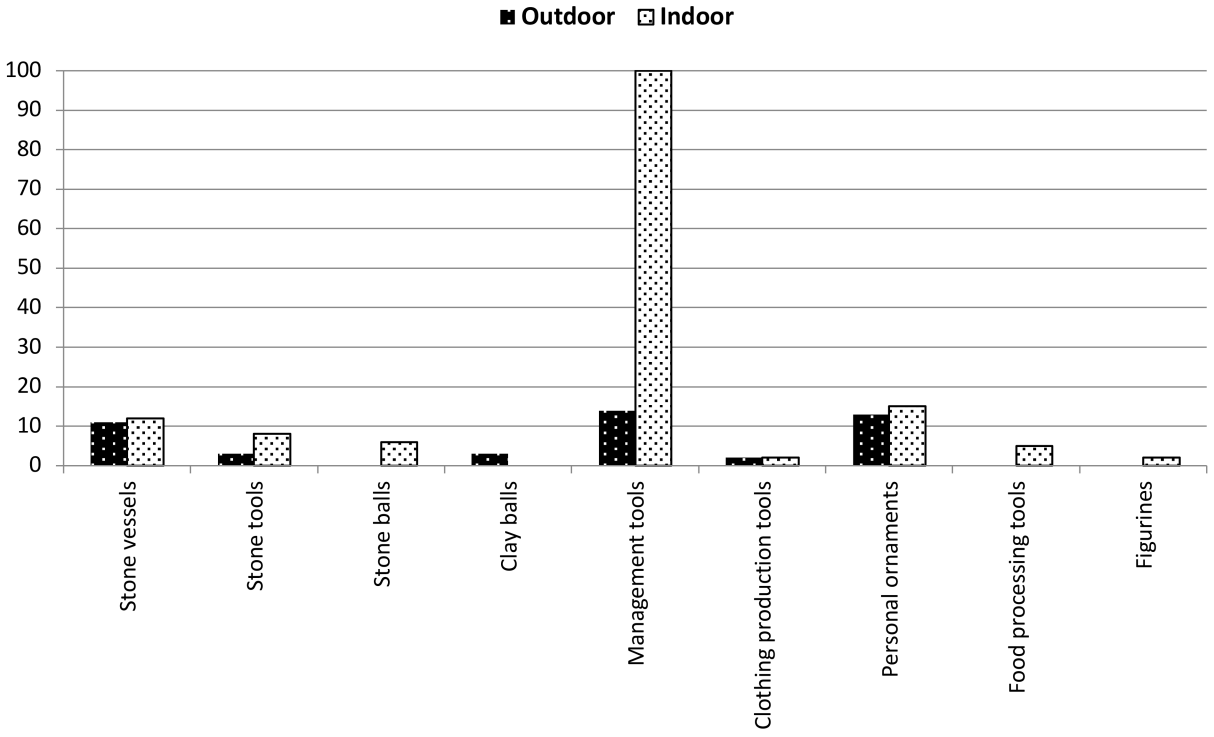

Fig. 5. The count of small finds categories in indoor and outdoor spaces at Tappeh Yahya Trench 4. (The absolute counts of more than 100 are not shown in the figure in order to make it more readable).

and 5, which contained most of the management tools. Due to the paucity of ceramic sherds and the absence of faunal remains, it is likely that the hearth was put in this room to generate light and heat rather than for cooking purposes or that the floor was kept exceptionally clean.

Room 5 stands out in that it contains 68 blank tablets, seven inscribed tablets, 42 sealings, as well as four storage jars. This room had a single doorway, ensuring the security of the material stored in it. Because of the presence of the storage jars (each with approximately 19 liter capacity), the content of the tablets discussing grain (Damerow and Englund 1989, 62), as well as the presence of sealings in this room, it is possible to suggest that this room once functioned as a storage for harvested grain and/or a center for monitoring the distribution of seeds at ploughing time (Lamberg-Karlovsky and Tosi 1989, 104).

Routine practices and exceptions in the Proto-Elamite horizon of Tappeh Yahya

In at least one instance an exception to an apparently regular and routine practice can be discerned based on the recovered data in Tappeh Yahya. The overwhelming majority of the management tools, including incised tablets, blank tablets and sealings, have been recovered from interior areas of the Proto-Elamite building complex in Yahya. However, a small number of them (eight in total) were found in what was possibly the outdoor socializing and cooking area. In acknowledging that the general practice was to possibly make, use, keep or dispose of these items inside the building, we should consider the circumstances under which these few tablets and sealings were brought outside and ultimately abandoned. Had a member of the community decided to disregard the community's tradition of using and keeping these tools inside by bringing them out? It is also possible that the specific content and nature of these tablets and sealings made it permissible for them to be brought out and disposed of in the outdoor areas. It is noteworthy that one of the tablets recovered from the socializing area is the only tablet from Yahya that mentions drink.[1] The presence of two shallow stone bowls, as well as the abundance of stone vessel sherds (including parts of three medium-sized stone bowls) in this socializing area was interpreted as a sign that drinking was practiced in this area. The impermeability of stone vessels makes them suitable for drinking. Also, another find in this area was a sherd of a carinated bowl with a hole at its bottom that has been compared with the similarly formed (but larger) beer brewing vessels in Mesopotamia (D. Potts 2001, 9). These drinks were consumed personally from smaller vessels and possibly shared among from the larger ones, as well.

Domestic practices during the Proto-Elamite horizon at Tappeh Hesār

The central portion of the Main Mound of Hesār consists of architecture that typologically and chronologically belongs to level II, contemporary with the Proto-Elamite horizon in Hesār (Howard 1989, 59). Tappeh Hesār is in a semi-arid landscape, on the central northern edge of the Iranian Central Plateau. In 1976, a joint Hesār restudy project was organized to reexamine the results of the original excavation of Tappeh Hesār that was undertaken by Erich F. Schmidt in 1931 and 1932 (Schmidt 1933; 1937).

1 From 27 recovered inscribed tablets, one deals with bread, one with bread and grain, one with bread and an unidentified subject, one with sheep, one with goats, four with grain, one with drink, six with ploughing, six with unidentified subjects and 4 are broken (Damerow and Englund 1989).

Unfortunately, the paucity of published data prevents me from studying the types and intensity of practices in outdoor areas in comparison to indoor areas. This problem also exists for the subsistence practices in Hesār during this time period.

It is only possible to know that trash was dumped in most of the open areas over a long duration of time. For example, on the Main Mound (**Fig. 6**), open area 5 that was close to room 1 (interpreted as a kitchen in the excavation report due to the co-presence of fire installations and storage bins) had a very hard-packed surface that was not plastered. On this surface a deposit of trash about 35 cm thick was recovered. This trash contained large quantities of animal bone,[2] two bone awls, flint blades and chips, a grinding stone fragment, a clay disk, several broken animal figurines, as well as metal slag, an ingot mold, and a shaft–hole axe mold (Howard 1989, 69). Area 9, the closest outdoor space to the possible pottery kiln, contained layers of trash mainly comprised of ceramic sherds, but no animal bone. This suggests that, since this trash was dumped over an expanse of time, the trash profile of outdoor areas can reflect

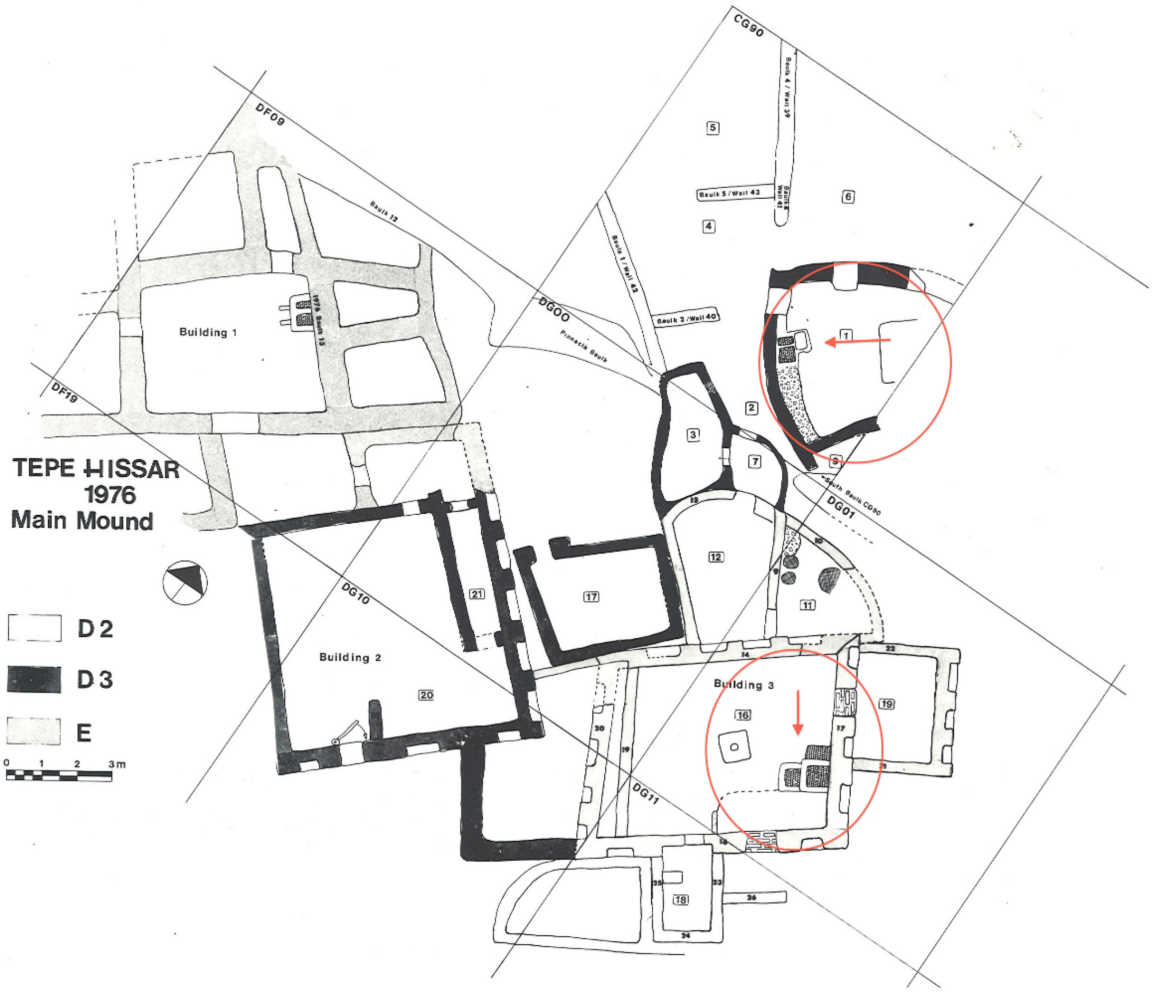

Fig. 6. Tappeh Hesār, Plan of the Main Mound area investigated, 1976 excavation season (after Howard 1989, Fig.1). The red circles indicate living spaces and fire installations built inside them.

2 This might be related to the enigmatic absence of any animal bone in the probable kitchen context (room 1).

the practices performed in the nearest roofed rooms.

No vegetal or animal remains have been analyzed from Hesār. During this period, we only know that the presence of grinding stones in all structures indicates that each household prepared its own grain for cooking or baking. No evidence of animal enclosures has been recovered, which may imply that animals were kept at a distance from residential areas (Dyson and Remsen 1989, 89).

Use of space during the Proto-Elamite horizon in Hesār

In general, during the Proto-Elamite horizon, Hesār contained fewer functionally restricted spaces relative to multipurpose practice loci than contemporary sites. If this is not simply the result of archaeological sampling, less segmentation in the architecture reflects less segmentation in various parts of culture, because social forces influence domestic practice and domestic practices influence architecture. Unlike Malyan with its urban quality, in Hesār (and Yahya) the individual residential units are relatively small, comprised of a multi-functional central room with smaller rooms surrounding it. If we define the basic domestic social unit as a group of related individuals who lived together in those architectural spaces, it is possible to project this pattern further onto the social sphere. The proximity, and possibly functional connection, of several architectural units on the Main Mound of Hesār might suggest the presence of broader kin-based residential groups. These facts may imply that the Hesār community during this period was organized based on principles of kinship, genealogy, and shared beliefs. Individual members of such communities adhered to conceptual realities that emanated from the implicit acceptance of inclusive group beliefs and relationship unity. On the domestic level, this conceptual structure applied to the basic communal group and its living space, tending to downplay architectural segmentation of each domestic practice (Bawden 1982, 167).

Practice and agency are the potential of an individual to act (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). Each space dedicated to a specific routine practice defines the potentials and limits of agency. Segmentation of spaces can be seen as a classification of different types of practice with the possibility of more limited practices performed in each space. For example, the spatial-routinized layout of Malyan decreased the potential for performing different practices in one space, as various practices weren supposed to be performed in segregated spaces. In contrast, the less segmented spaces in Hesār created leeway for more variety of practices to be performed in a single space. The relationship between these two processes is dialectical. In other words, specializing, restricting and limiting agency is a result of spatial segmentation and at the same time it intensifies this type of spatial organization.

A general look at daily practices during the Proto-Elamite horizon in four settlements

According to the published records, there are both broad similarities as well as variations in terms of the particular practices and combinations of practices performed in specific contexts at these four sites.

In Proto-Elamite Susa, urban, congested and highly divided indoor and outdoor spaces dedicated to different categories of practices are observable. The only possible kitchen identified in Ville Royale I was an indoor space and contained debris from cooking and preparing food including grinding grain. Storage activities that involved tablets, storage jars and sealings were performed in a different indoor space with limited access. In another indoor space possibly textile production and dyeing were conducted. Management

practices involving seals also carried out in association with textile production practices and in the same periphery. According to written documents the sedentary community at Susa kept close ties with the surrounding mobile communities.

In Malyan inside the ABC neighborhood as an instance (level 4A), what has been identified as a kitchen is located in an outdoor space containing debris related to food processing, cooking and storage activities. These activities involved storage jars, storage bins, seals and sealings. The adjacent indoor space that is thought to have been the general living area contained ceramic sherds and faunal remains, as well as a low concentration of beads, stone polishing tools and chipped stone tools. This indicates that the productive activities were performed in a general living area where most likely most of the food was consumed. Unlike Susa and Hesār, at Malyan these two classes of practice were not supposed to be performed in a segregated space. A reason for this situation might be that these productive activities such as bead and stone tool making were performed on a more limited scale than the large-scale production in Susa or possibly Hesār. Similar to Malyan, in Tappeh Yahya the remains of communal food and drink consumption as well as play co-occur with possible remains of productive activities such as stone bead and vessel production in an area interpreted as a general living and socializing space. Here at ABC it can be inferred that at least part of the food prepared in the outdoor kitchen area was served and consumed in the socializing space. Also, the presence of the sealings, as well as the jar stoppers (which were found in the pit that was located in this room), imply that part of this food was possibly received from outside in sealed vessels and jars. There is no indication of cloth production taking place in this building level of ABC.

In another instance in Malyan, a kitchen complex in the TUV neighborhood (building level II discussed above; Nicholas 1990) consisted of multiple indoor rooms where the processing and cooking of plants and meat took place in adjacent but segmented parts. This may mean that not all members of the society wanted and/or were allowed to consume both vegetal food and meat and were served either of these food types. The large dimensions of the next door courtyard, the high concentration of mass-produced vessels and the presence of a kitchen complex on a much larger scale than that of the domestic kitchen next to it all suggest that the commensality performed in the courtyard (and possibly the adjoining room) was of a special nature and included a larger social circle than just the residents of this building in Malyan. The marked increase in the number of fire installations, storage jars and total space dedicated to food preparation and cooking in comparison to the previous building level are signs that significant changes took place in regard to food preparation and cooking practices. These changes may have involved seasonal feasts. It is possible that these feasts were held in order to offset seasonal labor shortage through alliance-labor mechanisms where laborers were fed meager amounts of food in compensation for their labor (Kennedy 2012). The living area in this building level of TUV contained debris of cloth production, shell working, management tools, as well as limited remains from food consumption and food serving practices.

The presence of functionally specific public buildings in Malyan, which had a serving capacity beyond the needs of the residents of these buildings, such as the communal kitchen in TUV and the warehouse in ABC, implies the presence of one or several supra household level units. These units would have mobilized and controlled labor forces and planned long-range projects. However, the similarity of the residential units' architecturally undifferentiated internal spaces, their construction, the presence of multi-purpose living spaces, the relative similarity of material culture, and, most importantly, the

similarity of subsistence practices all imply that the Malyan community still was traditionally structured by principles of kinship. The potential attempted establishment of a public economic institution did not turn in to a long-term success. This is due to the fact that the practice of using the Proto-Elamite management system disappeared after a few hundred years.

In general, the residents of Malyan during the Proto-Elamite horizon procured almost all of their food from within the vicinity of the site. They practiced irrigated and rain-fed agriculture to produce grain. They gathered wild fruits and nuts (Nicholas 1990; Sumner 2003). Also, they procured meat through interactions and negotiations with mobile herders. They practiced hunting and large mammal management to a very limited extent. Based on the results of the faunal analysis, the residents of Proto-Elamite Malyan are predicted to have had little involvement in the raising of animals for food resources, since most of these resources could have been obtained through contact with the (most possibly) mobile population that lived in the area (Zeder 1985).

Based on ceramic evidence we can infer that grain was boiled into porridge or soup, as well as ground into flour and then baked in the form of bread. Botanical analysis shows that these grains consisted mostly of wheat, barley, and to a lesser extent legume (such as lentils; Miller 1982). Most commonly goat meat, but also the high meat-bearing sections of sheep and cattle carcasses were butchered in a standardized fashion, boiled into stew, or grilled on the hot stones of cobble hearths.

In the Proto-Elamite horizon of Tappeh Yahya (D. Potts 2001), both the possible kitchen space and a shaded socializing area are located outdoors. Food preparation and cooking as well as washing and cleaning in basins connected to a ceramic gutter, and also possibly limited cloth production are the main practices performed in the kitchen context. As discussed above, drinking and probably stone bowl manufacturing was performed in the shaded socializing area. Food serving and perhaps children's play took place in the indoor spaces of this time. In general, the residents of Yahya during the IVC2 phase both cultivated multiple types of wheat and barley and collected nuts and fruits. Wild grasses and other types of vegetation were gathered as fuel (Meadow 1986).

In Tappeh Hesār – in contrast to Susa, Yahya and Malyan – there is no domestic architectural space that can be either interpreted as a mono-functional or segregated space or labeled as a kitchen or general living area exclusively (Dyson and Remsen 1989). Food preparation and processing, food serving, storage, cloth production and play were the most important domestic practices performed in the indoor spaces of Tappeh Hesār during this time. As discussed above, the presence of multipurpose activity areas in Hesār and the apparent absence of the functionally restricted areas, especially in comparison to Malyan, imply less segmentation in the use of domestic space in this site. This in turn suggests a less hierarchical household structure. Consequently, this suggests a less complex division of labor (by age, gender, and status), gender roles and occupational specialization in Tappeh Hesār during the Proto-Elamite horizon. This is in sharp contrast with the highly segmented, compartmentalized, and functionally specific contexts in Susa, Malyan and Yahya. The difference in the degree of segmentation implies the various degrees of limit on the agency of individuals as having the potential to act. The performance of more practices in a single space meant a looser grip on routine practices and greater leeway to exercise agency.

The process of community formation during the Proto-Elamite horizon

Residents of Proto-Elamite settlements interacted regularly among each other, and

their repeated interactions reproduced their communal mentality (Kolb and Snead 1997, 611). Based on my analysis different practices including food preparation and socializing were conducted in different manners with varied combinations of other practices and in a varied combination of outdoor and indoor spaces, multifunctional or mono-functional areas during different occupation phases or even the same occupation phases in two different sections of one settlement. These practices were also performed with different intensity in each building level studied. This particular combination of practices performed within a locale is an indication of a relatively unique social structure in each settlement. Apart from the practices, the type and frequency of material culture assemblage was varied in each community. Tablets, cylinder seals, beveled-rim bowls, goblets, low-sided trays, monochrome and polychrome Jemdet Nasr style vessels were used in different combinations of social practices, which in turn shaped communities in different settlements and the network created among these settlements shaped the larger intra-site community, or the Proto-Elamite network on the Iranian plateau. The significance of these various assemblages of material cultural may originate from the possibility that each of the "type fossils" was made and used through different practices. This points to the fact that not all of the practices that were performed through using each of the Proto-Elamite "type fossils" were practiced in every settlement consistently or even not all these objects served the same purposes in every community.

Individuals shared a sense of community and membership that was dependent on common residence and daily practices. This is because those who lived within a community were closely attached to the surrounding landscape and they "inscribed" their occupational or ideational space in distinctive and patterned ways, for example, with respect to their household, or to their modes of subsistence, production, and consumption (Joyce and Hendon 2000; Knapp 2003; Bernbeck 2008). At the same time, local communities often crosscut single places/sites. They encompassed groups of affiliated people who live apart from each other and interact only for a limited period of time. These "multisited" communities change the locality of the community, some members go back to an "old" place for some time, some people stay year around in a focal site and some other members move out to more ephemeral sites, and they do all this through recursive practices (Bernbeck 2008, 62–63). The existence of a "multisited" community is discernible in at least two settlements during the Proto-Elamite: Susa and Malyan. Based on the information contained in some tablets, it is implied that the residents of Susa acquired wool through ties with the "semi-nomadic" or "non-sedentary agro-pastoralists" of the Zagros Mountains (Dahl 2005). This is in line with a model that concludes that the settled population of lowland Susiana and the mobile agro-pastoralists of the Zagros highlands gradually forged closer ties at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE in southwestern and south-central Iran (Alizadeh 2010, 370–71). Also, the new pattern of similarity among the ceramics of Susiana and highland ceramics can be interpreted as a reflection of regional communication among various highland and lowland communities. These ties came about as a result of constant contacts among the mobile pastoral tribes in this region and the settled population (Alizadeh 2010).

Also, in Malyan analysis of faunal remains has shown that residents procured animal products by dealing with a group responsible for animal management (Zeder 1985, 309–13). We know that professional pastoral groups were involved in this management system because of the almost exclusive focus on caprids as well as the age control system of culling patterns (Zeder 1985, 309–23). The almost exclusive focus on caprid meat consumption in Malyan implies the strong

possibility of the involvement of nomadic groups who traditionally specialize in sheep and goat management.

In any complex society, we should expect to find local and imagined communities (Anderson 1991) coexisting as nested and/or cross-cutting entities. However, shared living conditions in local communities and frequent interactions among their members gave each local community its own character different from the larger, fluid imagined community that encompassed Susa, Malyan, Yahya, Shahr-e Sukhteh and possibly Hesār and other settlements in the center of the plateau. Ultimately however, local and imagined Proto-Elamite communities were not fully separate and distinct, and in reality, they partially cross-cut each other, both (like any other community) being predicated on membership and a perceived common identity.

The practice of using tablets and seals as a technology of communication and the new order of controlling and recording production and productive relations by these media was a channel through which the Proto-Elamite community was imagined. Based on the affinities of material culture, specifically ceramic forms and types in each area, this imagined community was manifested in micro-regions or separate urban/rural zones. For example, each major settlement such as Susa, Malyan, Yahya and Hesār together with their surrounding settled or mobile communities were micro-regions out of which the larger Proto-Elamite imagined community was composed. This imagination must have depended on multiple and continual travels of members among these communities, communicating with each other. The result of this process is a social formation or community that is not as rigid as the concept of a society, culture, or ethnic group. Its territorial boundaries are fluid and not fixed in time and space.

The Proto-Elamite horizon as an imagined community functioned more or less as a network with nodes and links that in some cases bypassed certain geographic areas. This network fluctuated in its temporal and spatial boundaries. Each settlement with Proto-Elamite material culture belonged to a nested network where different local and new materialities coincided with each other. These new materialities such as tablets, cylinder seals and specific ceramic forms may not have coincided with local material culture at many sites (e.g., Shahr-e Sukhte, Yahya, Hesār, Sialk, Tol-e Spid and Tol-e Nurabad). In this network, ideologies moved across communities, they were adopted in certain sites since they were of interest to certain individuals, groups, or institutions. In some cases, they bypassed territories (e.g., Zagros mountains and the western part of the central plateau) resulting in no appropriation of the Proto-Elamite material style at all in these locations.

Conclusion

Local and imagined/networked communities coexisted as nested and/or crosscutting entities in Proto-Elamite Iran. However, constant interaction and local conditions grounded each local community in a way that distinguished it from a more fluid Proto-Elamite imagined community. Ultimately however, local and imagined communities were not fully separate and distinct. What made these communities "Proto-Elamite" was the adoption of a new lifeworld incorporated somewhat differently in each settlement. A portion of the "Proto-Elamite" community was imagined in the minds of its members. These members distinguished themselves from the "other" through specific symbolism and deliberate adoption of different classes of material culture that conveyed contrasting messages. The social practices involved in creating, inscribing

and using tablets as well as other classes of the Proto-Elamite management tools or ceramic vessels, was far from homogenous in different sites. Using controlling and management technologies such as inscribing tablets, sealing commodities and storage spaces involved cultural symbols, icons and ideological metaphors. These were adopted by the common discourse but did not have strong roots in the social structure, practices and 'real' space. This can be one of the reasons why they did not continue in the settlements where they were adopted for more than a few hundred years. During this period more commonalities are discernible on an intra-settlement level rather than an inter-settlement scale. Therefore, calling the Proto-Elamite phenomenon a "homogenous horizon" is inaccurate. The Proto-Elamite phenomenon was a weakly linked entity, and therefore I suggest that calling it the "Proto-Elamite network" is more consistent with the archaeological data.

We cannot think of the Proto-Elamite horizon as covering a sphere where everything is affected by the same homogenous culture with slight variations. The Proto-Elamite network was dynamic and did not press every location into the same cultural mold. As demonstrated above the diversity in different practices, including domestic practices, socializing, communicative actions and loci where these communications were conducted, and administrative practices, confirms the great amount of variation among local communities. They only appear very similar to each other on the surface. Generally, theories that have tried to explain this phenomenon regard it as a homogenous and synchronized entity all over the Iranian plateau (e.g., Lamberg-Karlovsky 1978; Lamberg-Karlovsky and Potts 2001; Alden 1982; 2013; Sumner 2003). Each settlement had its own process of becoming a constituting node of the larger Proto-Elamite network. The disappearance of Proto-Elamite material culture from these sites at various points of time was due to the collapse of this network, because the newly adopted practices in these nodes were replaced by other practices that possibly had a closer association with the social and economic structure of the local communities and the indigenous population. After the end of the imagined Proto-Elamite community, in most of these settlements locally distinct cultures thrived in all of these micro-regions mostly for a longer period of time.

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