

Jiroft as seen from Susa^{*}

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1. Cultural Horizons at Susa in the Second Half of the 3rd Millennium BCE

The remarkable discovery of the Bronze Age settlements in the Halil River Valley south of the city of Jiroft, first through looting and then through excavations led by Yousef Madjidzadeh, has entirely changed our understanding of the Iranian Plateau in the 3rd millennium BCE.^[1] Until the 1960s, it was thought (on the basis of cuneiform texts) that Susa and Anshan - the dual capitals of Elam - were the predominant powers in Bronze Age Iran, with scattered tribes and villages sprinkled across the highland regions. Excavations at Shahr-i Sokhta and Tepe Yahya in the 1960s and 70s did much to challenge this model,^[2] but still Susa and Tall-i Malyan (ancient Anshan) remained the major urban centers of this period. Today, with unparalleled information emerging from the looted graves and excavated settlements of the Halil River Valley, we must reconfigure our understanding of Early Bronze Age power dynamics in this region.

In this essay, the Susa IV and V periods will be discussed in relation to the excavated materials at Konar Sandal South and North, and the looted materials that have since been recovered. Piotr Steinkeller^[3] has convincingly argued that the region of the Halil River Basin was “Marhashi”, a land known from late 3rd millennium texts in Mesopotamia. By finding close artifactual (and, in particular, glyptic) comparanda between Elam and southeastern Iran, we may come to a better understanding of both regions and the political and cultural relations between them^[4].

1.1. Susa IVA ca. 2600-2350 BCE (V.R. levels 12-9; Acr. levels 4-3)

The archaeological period of Susa IVA is widely attested in the Ville Royale from the 1929-33 excavations of R. de Mecquenem^[5] and layers 12-9 of later excavations by E. Carter.^[6] It is also present on the Acropolis in levels 4-3, investigated by M.-J. Stéve and H. Gasche.^[7] L. Le Breton identified the period through typological division as Susa Db-Dd.^[8]

The two decorative ceramic styles (polychrome and monochrome wares) known at Susa during the IVA period have strong affinities with the ceramic corpus known from Luristan and in the Zagros piedmont sites. A similar polychrome ware is found at Tepe Mussian^[9] and at sites in the Jebel Hamrin.^[10] The monochrome ware finds close comparisons with the burial goods in the graves of western Luristan, in particular Qabr Nahi.^[11] The iconographic, stylistic, and typological evidence concerning other aspects of artistic expressions from Susa (especially glyptic and statuary) show strong links with contemporary Mesopotamian art of the Early Dynastic II and III Periods.

1.2. Susa IVB ca. 2350-2150 BCE (V.R. levels 8-7; Acr. levels 2-1)

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Susa IVB is known in levels 8-7 of the Ville Royale investigated by E. Carter.^[12] It was also identified in the upper two layers excavated by Stéve and Gasche in the Acropolis (levels 2-1) and as Susa De, following the typological classes established by Le Breton.^[13] Some comparisons are documented in the Luristan region (Kalleh Nisar A2), as well as at Yahya IVB. However, the general cultural horizon is strongly influenced by political and military events of the Akkadian dynasty, which certainly controlled Susa for much of the period. The disappearance of painted ware, the affinities with Akkadian glyptic art in the corpus of seals from Susa, and the use of the Akkadian language in the royal and local inscriptions, are clear evidence for a strong cultural influence coming from the west.

The successive archaeological phases (Ur III and Simashki dynasties) are well known in the levels investigated by E. Carter,^[14] in the Ville Royale (levels 6-3) as well as in the graves on the Apadana mound (dated “XXIII” and “XX siècle” by de Mecquenem). The phase has been further identified in the Ville Royale at -4.50 m below the Achaemenid palace;^[15] in chantier 1 (where they also found a mud brick with a Shu-Sin inscription)^[16] and chantier 2 (where inscribed tablets with references to Ebarat are associated with the monochrome ware of the previous period);^[17] and in the Donjon area (where graves were found between -5 and -8 m below the surface along with mud bricks with Attahushu royal inscriptions of the Sukkalmah dynasty).^[18]

The Simashki Period is documented in the northern part of the Ville Royale excavated by R. Ghirshman.^[19] Phases VII-VI of excavation area ‘B’ have revealed the period before the conquests of Shulgi (Phase VII).^[20] The successive phase is characterized by the direct control of the kings of Ur (VII-VI). Finally, the period of the first dynasty of Isin is preserved in phase VI. A sealing with an inscription of the Queen Mekubi, married to Tan-Ruhuratir (king of Simashki) and daughter of Bilalama (king of Eshnunna; ca. 1980 BCE), was found in the VI periodical phase of area B.^[21] Phase V is probably linked to the 20th century BCE and to the final part of the Simashki dynasty (ca. 1900/1850 BCE).

1.3. Susa V ca. 2150-1900 BCE (V.R. levels 6-3)

The Susa V cultural horizon is associated with the end of the third and the first century of the 2nd millennium BCE. In this period, the extensive presence of Elamite (Elam and possibly southeastern Iran) and Persian Gulf material is well known.

Only in a few instances do we see close integrations with Mesopotamia. For example, the monochrome ware of Susa V finds strong comparisons with the contemporary Mesopotamian corpus.^[22] The figurines in clay are distributed widely in the western alluvium,^[23] and the glyptic art is distinct but clearly influenced by contemporary workshops in Babylonia.^[24]

By this time, a strong Elamite character had developed in the visual arts. For the first time since the Proto-Elamite period, the seals at Susa show a distinctive visual iconography as well as stylistic features that can be identified as “Elamite”.^[25] The presence at Susa of Old-Elamite and Anshanite glyptic art is a clear witness to the new cultural developments apparent on the Khuzistan Plain.^[26]

In this period, the presence of imported material from eastern regions at Susa is particularly remarkable. Notable examples include: Omani steatite/chlorite vessels with double concentric circle on the surface attributed by P. de Miroschedji^[27] to the “*série récente*”; Dilmunite stamp seals;^[28] three “pseudo-Harappan” seals;^[29] a cubic weight clearly imported from the Indus Valley;^[30] Harappan etched beads;^[31] an alabaster statue probably influenced or originated by artisans living in the Zhob Valley (Mundigak IV-1 e IV-2);^[32] and finally some vessels imported from Bactria.^[33]

2. Southeastern Iranian Material at Susa

As Pierre Amiet has shown,^[34] the archaeological finds from southeastern Iranian regions found at Susa are numerous, and they allow us to briefly consider the important historical role played by the city, especially concerning economic transactions and cultural integration in the commercial dynamics of the Iranian plateau.^[35] Imported material from southeastern Iran at Susa include: a cylinder seal; two impressions of cylinder seals; a chlorite statue; a zoomorphic axe; an axe with relief decoration on the blade; two axes with vertical flat blades; an axe with a horizontal flat blade; numerous steatite/chlorite vessels; and two alabaster vessels.

E. Porada was the first to identify the seal style of southeastern Iran, which she associated on stylistic and iconographic grounds with the Akkadian Period^[36] or more generally to the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE.^[37] In successive years, P. Amiet published new and more complete seals of the southeastern Iranian type, identifying these as manifestations of “Trans-Elamite art”.^[38] First attempts to localize the origin of production of this distinctive glyptic style were supported by the archaeological research at Tepe Yahya^[39] and Shahdad.^[40] There, seals of this distinctive style are found in the same levels as the ‘serie ancienne’ chlorite, generally dated to ca. 2400-2200 BCE.

The duration of the production of the objects of steatite or chlorite of the Jiroft Type (i.e., ‘serie ancienne’) is debated. In Mesopotamia, these vessels are found in archaeological contexts of the Early Dynastic II and III periods. This archaeological evidence, combined with material from Ur and Mari,^[41] places the early phase of chlorite production from ED II to the Akkadian period.^[42] Chronological evaluations concerning Period IV at Yahya must be explained through material culture.^[43] The evidence of a distinctive southeastern Iranian glyptic art at Yahya and Shahdad (and now at Konar Sandal South) confirms its dating on both relative and radiocarbon dates to between 2400-2200/2150 BCE.

2.1. Materials at Susa with connections to the Halil River Civilization

The sealings from Susa (Figs. 1-2) in the collection of the Louvre Museum that are impressed with seals from southeastern Iran (Sb 6680 and 6707) were found during the excavations carried out by J. de Morgan. The first sealing (Sb. 6680), with its inscription, is 3.8 cm. in height and seems to be closely related to the earlier southeastern Iranian glyptic traditions, probably dating to the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE.^[44] The second sealing “provenient des même couches de terrain que le vases peints des Ier et Iie styles”,^[45] is 2.7 cm high and seems to date to the beginning of the fourth quarter of the 3rd millennium BCE.^[46]

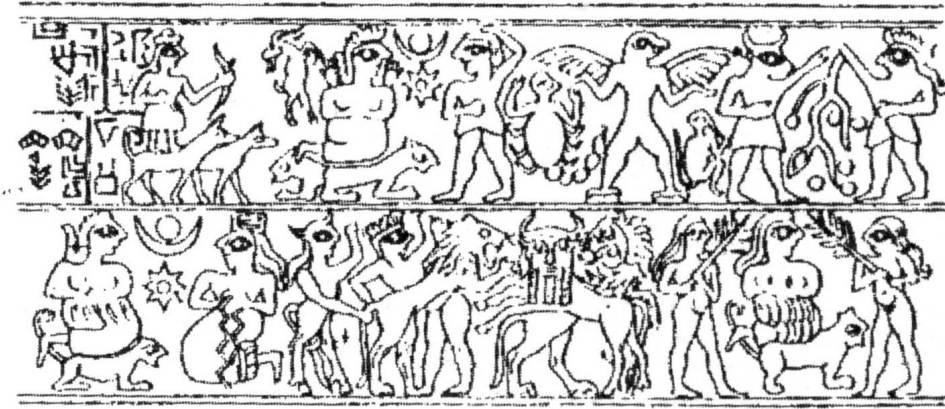


Fig. 1: seal impression from Susa (after Amiet 1986: fig. 71).



Fig. 2: seal impression from Susa (after Amiet 1994: fig. 3).



Fig. 3: chlorite seal from Susa (after Ascalone 2006: fig. 3c-d).

A previously unpublished seal found at Susa, now in the Bastan Museum of Tehran, must also be an import from southeastern Iran (NMI 624/46). The seal (Fig. 3) is carved from steatite and is badly eroded. Its dimensions are 2.8 cm in height and 1.1 cm in diameter. The seal depicts a composite four-winged being in front of an altar or platform decorated with geometric patterns. The winged being is received by a small indistinct figure, probably divinity to judge from the presence of horns, who squats on a high platform and holds a cup in his hand. A pair of zigzag lines complete the scene.^[47]

This seal from Susa is related to the corpus of seals generally attributed to the Jiroft area (Tepe Yahya) and the Takab Plain (Shahdad). The scene has its strongest iconographical links with a limestone seal from grave 193 in the Main Cemetery Area A at Shahdad, where a winged being stands behind a goddess seated on a platform.^[48]

A chlorite statuette (Fig. 4) is also probably an import to Susa from eastern Iran^[49] to judge from the material and the style and method of manufacture. The figure's seated posture and covered legs is widely represented in southeastern Iranian cylinder seals. Such kneeling figures are distinctive of the glyptic art from southeastern Iran during the 3rd millennium BCE. This image is well known in seals from Shahdad and Yahya, as well as in unprovenanced seals assigned to the region. Figures in the same posture are also rendered on the Standard of Shahdad.^[50]

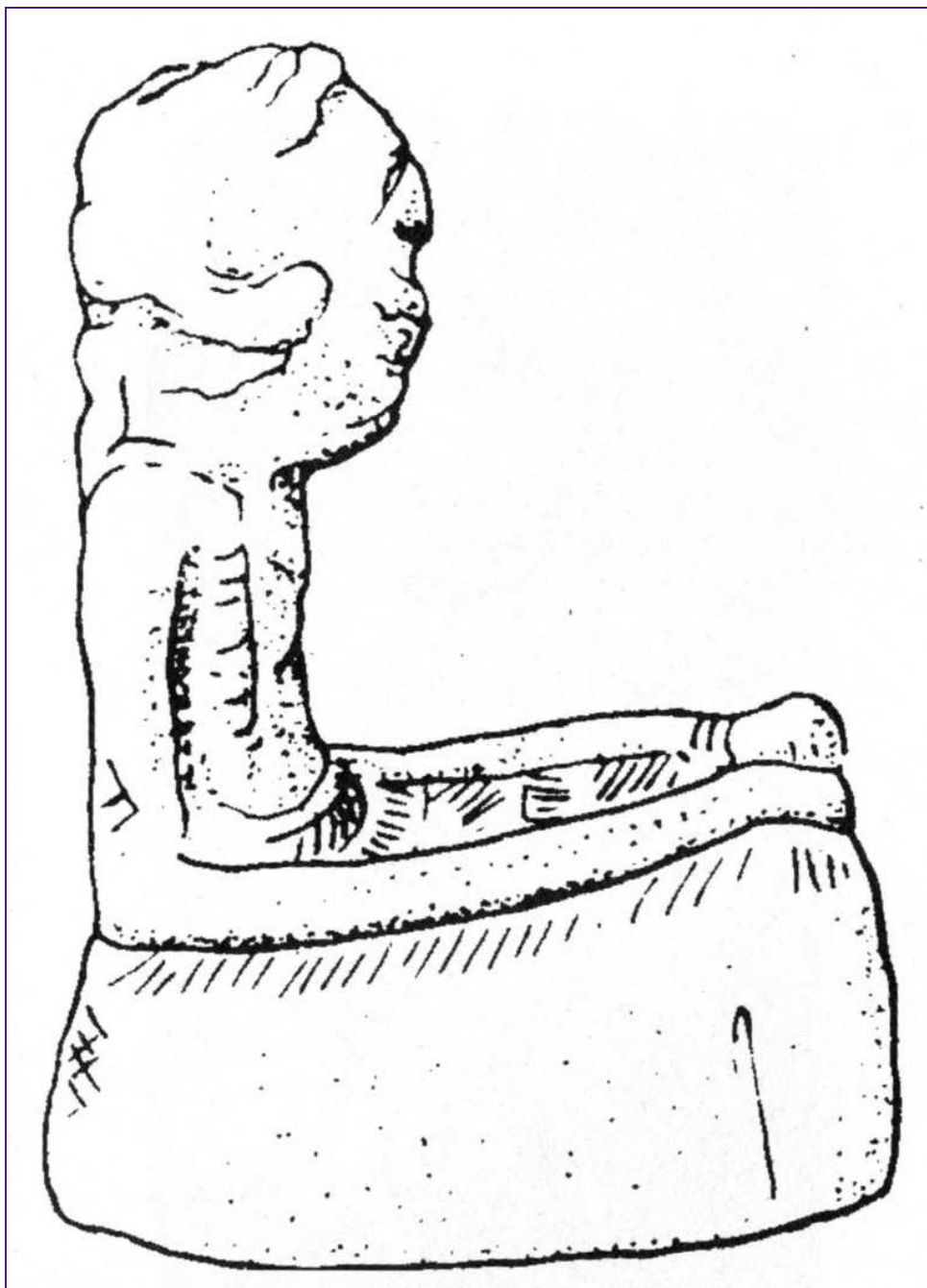


Fig. 4: chlorite statuette from Susa (after Amiet 1986: fig. 108).

Effigy statues, sculpted from clay and found in the graves at Shahdad,^[51] also assume this posture. It is also seen on a bronze pin in the Louvre^[52] and on circular disks in lapis lazuli confiscated from the looters and now in the museum in Kerman.^[53] Another object found in the excavations at Susa that likely comes from southeastern Iran or Bactria is an axe with relief decoration on the blade (Fig. 5). The specimen was published for the first time by de

Mecquenem, who initially proposed a dating to the “XXV siècle”, [54] which he later pushed a century earlier to ca. 2600 BCE. [55] The blade of the axe joins the socket at an oblique angle, with the edges of the blade perfectly straight and symmetrical. The axe type is unique within the Susa metallurgical tradition, while it is widely attested in southeastern Iran and to a lesser degree in Bactria. [56] The closest comparison is to an example found in the cemetery of Khinaman, [57] and to another found in a grave at Shahdad. [58] Other comparable axes from uncertain archaeological contexts have been assigned to Bactria. [59] The presence of the same type of axe rendered on a seal dated (through its inscription) to the reign of Idadu (ca. 2000 BCE) allows us to assign a terminus ante quem for this axe type to the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. However, it is certainly possible that the examples in the east are earlier.

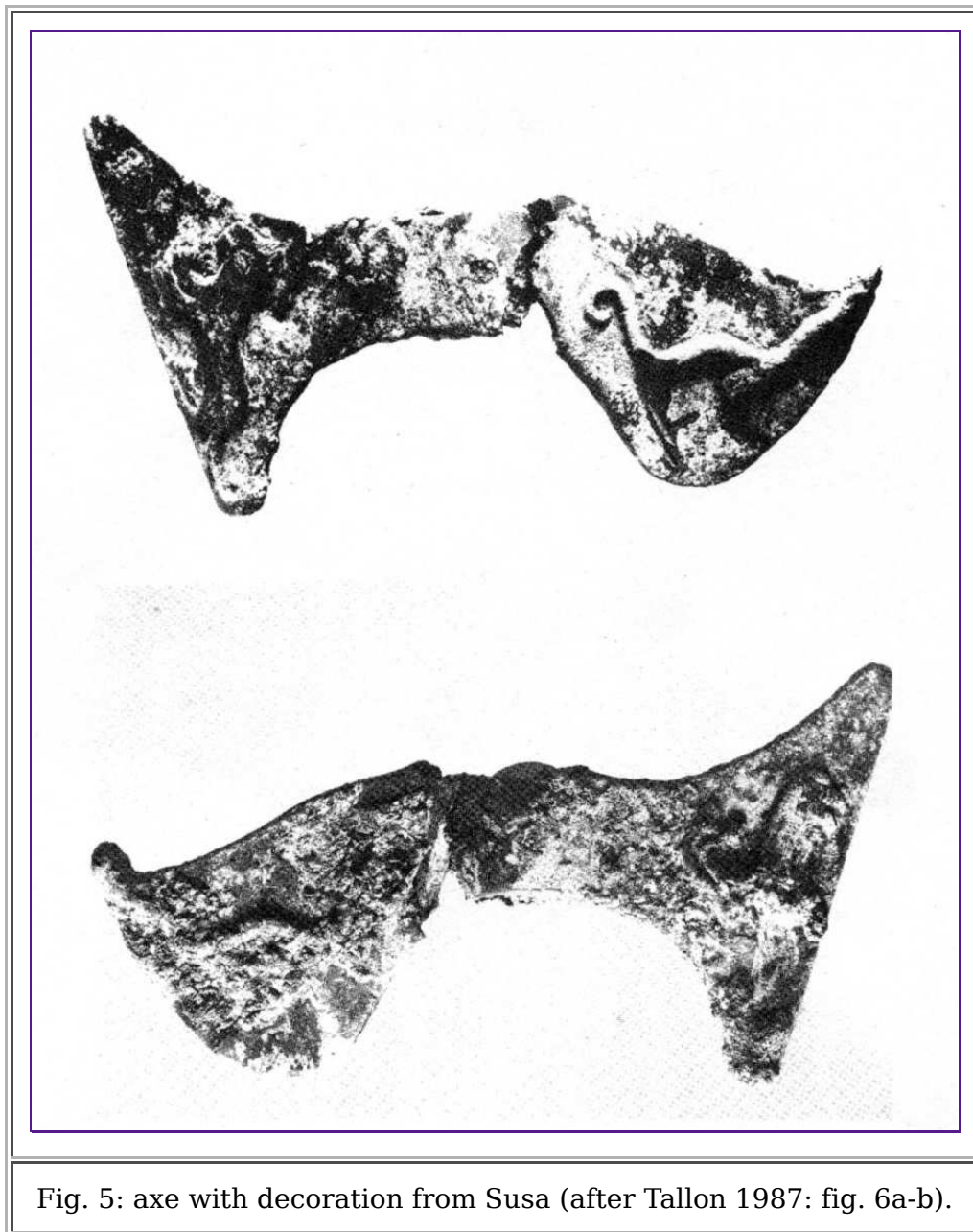
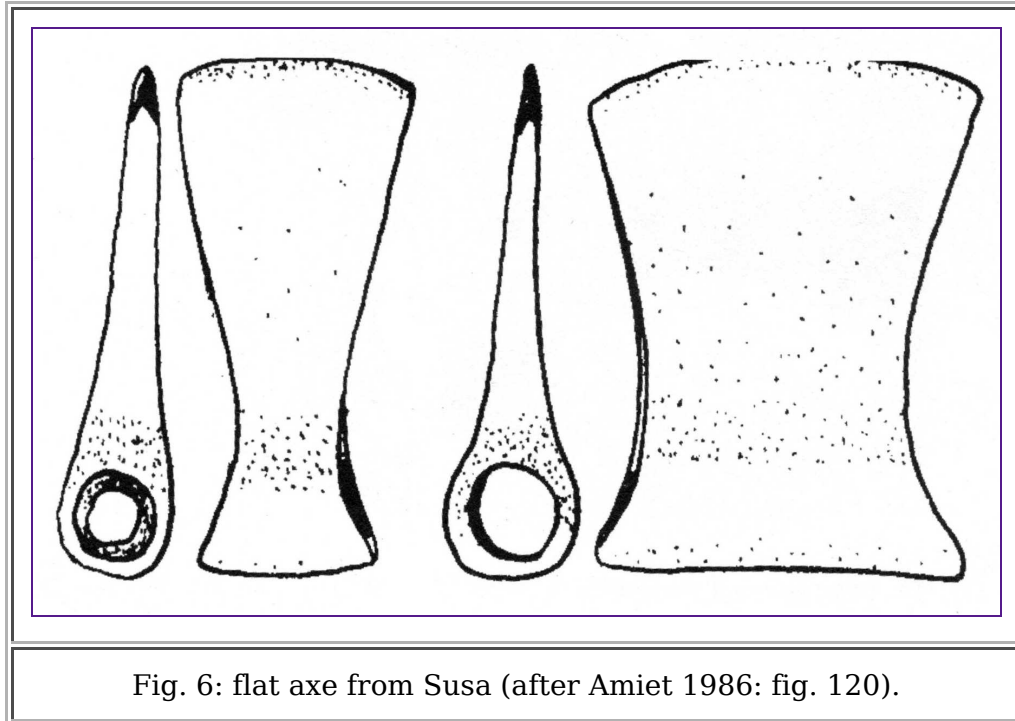


Fig. 5: axe with decoration from Susa (after Tallon 1987: fig. 6a-b).

Two more axes from Susa having flat blades are clear evidence of articulated commercial and cultural exchanges between the lowland site and the regions of the Iranian Plateau (Fig. 6).^[60] Both axes represent a specific type known among the looted materials from the Halil River Valley. Another comparison to these axes are said to come from the region of the Lut;^[61] from Damin not far from the Halil River;^[62] further to the east at Shahi Tump;^[63] from Chanhu-daro,^[64] and, curiously, from Saqqiz in Azerbaijan.^[65] The archaeological context at the site of Damin shows strong links with level IV at Bampur, allowing us to suggest that this type of axe was produced in the last quarter of the 3rd millennium BCE.

A fourth type of axe documented at Susa that originates in southeastern Iran has a vertical flat blade which is also widely attested in the Halil River Valley (Fig. 7).^[66] Numerous axes of this type were found among the confiscated materials from the looted graves near Jiroft.^[67] Other similar axes are known from Mundigak^[68] and Maikop.^[69]



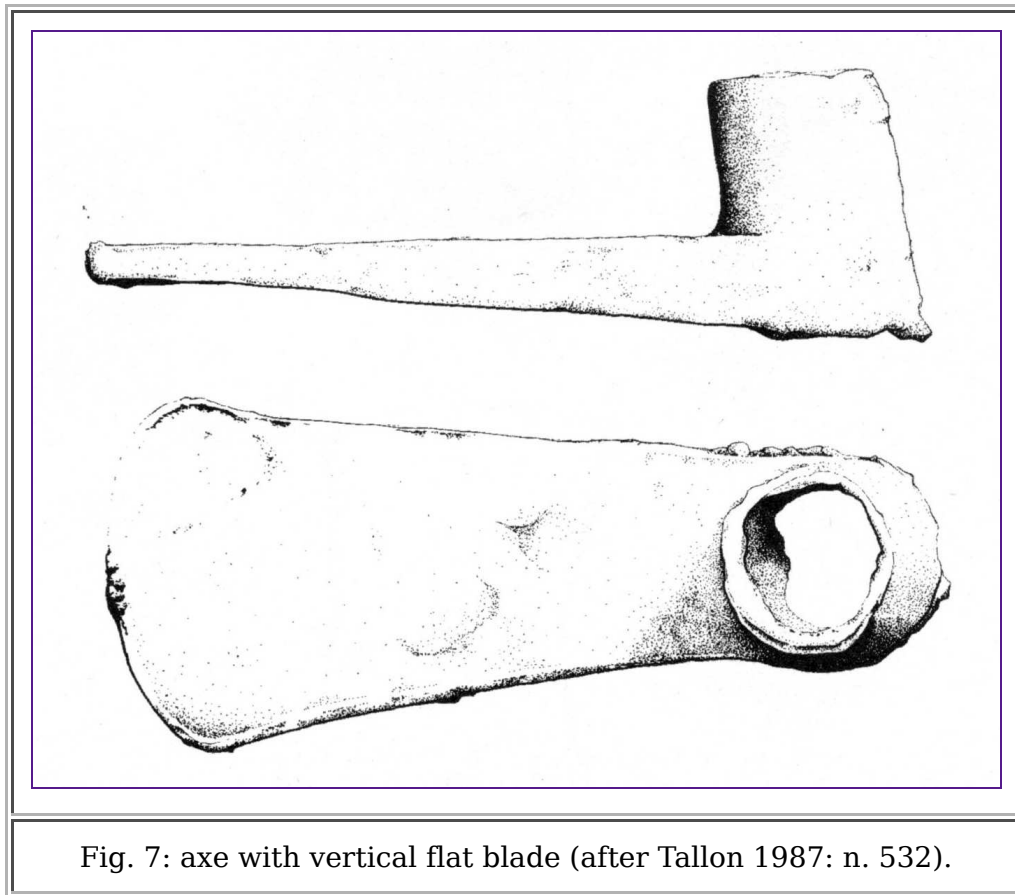


Fig. 7: axe with vertical flat blade (after Tallon 1987: n. 532).

Two alabaster vessels from Susa must also be considered imported material from southeastern Iran^[70] when considered in light of the material coming from the looted Jiroft graves (Fig. 8).^[71] The Susa alabaster vessels were found in the “Vase à la Cachette,” which is generally attributed on the basis of its morphology and painted decoration (as well as to the cylinder seals found inside the vessel) to the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE.^[72] The alabaster used for these vessels shows a high percentage of calcium carbonate, unknown among other examples from Susa which tend to be made of gypsum.^[73]

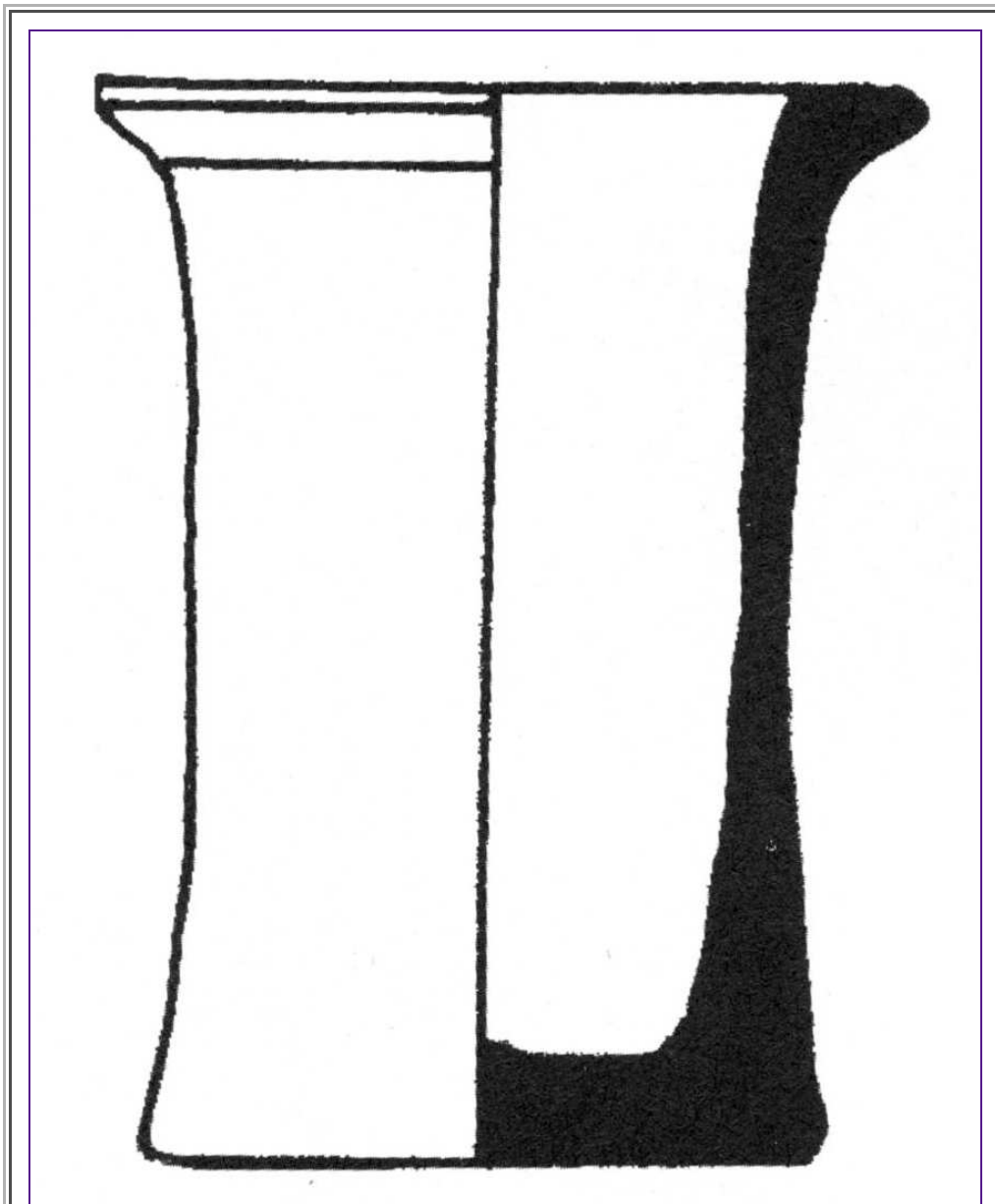


Fig. 8: alabaster vessel from Susa (after Amiet 1986: fig. 96: 8).

3. Conclusions

The abundant evidence at Susa of material imported from southeastern Iran allows us to reconstruct an articulated system of exchange, direct or indirect, between the lands of the alluvium and those of the highlands.^[74] The relationship among the political and cultural entities of the Jiroft civilization appear to be uninterrupted from the middle of the 3rd to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, when a diffuse crisis is attested in regional complexes

of southeastern Iran.[75] The chlorite/steatite vessels are particularly important to our understanding of the role played by Susa in the diffusion of artistic and cultural practices which originated in the Jiroft civilization. The broad chronological range of chlorite/steatite vessels,[76] their wide distribution,[77] and the indigenous copies in bituminous stone at Susa, are important indicators of the frequency of the cultural interactions/integrations between the Susiana Plain and the sites of the Halil River Valley.

It seems probable that Susa played a central role in the re-elaboration of eastern Iranian artistic production for local use and for a limited market oriented toward southern Mesopotamia. The archaeological evidence allows us to identify multiple roles performed by Susa in the interactive cultural dynamics and commercial relations with the Halil River Valley, Baluchistan Province, and the polities on the edge of the Desert of Lut. Susa was a cultural and artistic nexus in which the artistic features characteristic of the Jiroft civilization were re-invented and adapted for local and foreign consumption. This is most clearly exemplified in the bituminous vessels produced as local copies of the vessels made in the Halil River Valley. These three different roles carried out at Susa in relation with the eastern highlands seem to be confirmed by the imported materials coming from the Oxus civilization, the region of the Persian Gulf, and the Indus Valley. These imports include two compartmented seals;[78] an eagle pendant;[79] a limestone statuette;[80] some alabaster disks and short and small columns;[81] four Dilmunite stamp seals and two sealings;[82] numerous chlorite/steatite vessels from Oman;[83] and finally a cubic weight,[84] a limestone head[85] and etched carnelian beads[86] from the Indus Valley. All are clear examples of the robust commercial role played by Susa as an intermediary site between the Mesopotamian cities and the east.

Susa was not only a center able to develop long-distance commercial trade, but also a city where multiple cultural aspects were integrated and re-elaborated within the indigenous context. This role seems to have been particularly important in the cultural dynamics of the Susiana Plain. The presence of chlorite/vessels of the “serie ancienne” type carrying Mesopotamian iconography (unknown to the Jiroft ateliers; for example see the Mesopotamian Imdugud), six local copies of Dilmunite stamp seals,[87] two Dilmunite cylinder seals,[88] an Indus-type cylinder seal,[89] and an Indus-style rounded stamp seal[90] all attest to the local adaption of foreign styles. Furthermore, stamp seals with (pseudo-)Harappan inscriptions are clear evidence for the cultural integration and interaction documented at Susa during the last centuries of the 3rd and first centuries of the 2nd millennium BCE. How the new material from the Jiroft will affect this picture must await future research and publications.

FOOTNOTES

[*] Part of this paper has been presented to the “1st International Congress on the Halil Rud Civilization”, held at Jiroft from 30/01/2005 to 03/02/2005. I would like to thank H. Pittman for her suggestions and revisiting English.

[1] Madjidzadeh 2003; 2008; Piran 2013. See also Vidale - Desset 2013.

[2] Lamberg-Karlovsky - Tosi 1973.

[3] Steinkeller 1982.

[4] Ascalone 2006: 113-125.

[5] De Mecquenem 1934: 211-215.

- [6] Carter 1974.
- [7] Stéve - Gasche 1971.
- [8] Le Breton 1957: pl. XXVI, 8.11.
- [9] Wright 1981: 111-125.
- [10] Killick - Roaf 1979: 540.
- [11] Vanden Berghe 1973: 28.
- [12] Carter 1974.
- [13] Le Breton 1957.
- [14] Carter 1974; 1976; 1978; 1979; 1980.
- [15] de Mecquenem 1922: 134-137; 1924: 110-113; 1934; 1943.
- [16] de Mecquenem 1934: 209-211.
- [17] de Mecquenem 1934: 221.
- [18] de Mecquenem 1934: 227-234; 1943; see especially Malbran-Labat 1995.
- [19] Ghirshman 1965; 1966a; 1966b; 1967a; 1967b; 1968a; 1970.
- [20] Ghirshman 1968b: 7.
- [21] Ghirshman 1968b: 4-7.
- [22] See in particular Gasche 1973: types 1-3, 5-6, 12, 15-16, 18, 21, 23.
- [23] de Mecquenem 1934: fig. 85:1-10; Spycket 1992: 36-83, nn. 127-429.
- [24] Amiet 1972: 189-223, nn. 1, 473-730.
- [25] Ascalone 2016 and 2018.
- [26] Amiet 1972: 210-211 and Ascalone 2011.
- [27] de Miroschedji 1973.
- [28] Amiet 1972: 221-222, nn. 1, 716-719; 1974: 109; 1986: fig. 92: 1-10.
- [29] Amiet 1986: 143, 148 and 177, fig. 94.
- [30] Amiet 1986: 143, fig. 93; see also Ascalone - Peyronel 2003.
- [31] Amiet 1986: 144, 148, fig. 92.
- [32] Amiet 1966: fig. 112; cf. Gouin 1969: 47, fig. 2.
- [33] Amiet 1977: 98-99, figs. 7.4 and 8a-b; 1979: 154, fig. 2). See D.T. Potts (1999) for a comprehensive discussion.

- [34] Amiet 1986.
- [35] Ascalone 2006: 79-85.
- [36] Porada 1964; 1965: 41, fig. 16; Amiet 1973: 26.
- [37] Porada 1975: 367, fig. 283.
- [38] Amiet 1973; 1974; 1986: 165-69, fig. 132; 1994; 1997. For southeastern Iranian seals see also Porada 1982, 1988; Winkelmann 1997, and Ascalone 2008; 2011: 331-360.
- [39] Pittman 2001: 232-240.
- [40] Hakemi 1997a: 661.
- [41] Parrot 1956: 113, pl. XLVI-LI; 1967: 180-182, figs. 226-228, pl. LXXI; 1974: 42-43, figs. 11-12.
- [42] Ascalone 2007: tab. 1.
- [43] Potts - Lamberg-Karlovsky 2001.
- [44] Delaporte 1920: 57, tab. 45: 11-12, S.462; Porada 1962: 33, fig. 13; Amiet 1980a: n. 1363; 1986: 128, 167, 197, fig. 71; Winkelmann 1997: tab. 1h; 2000: fig. 2; Ascalone 2005b: fig. 18i; 2006: fig. 17b; 2008: fig. 8c 2011: n. 4A.15; Pittman 2002).
- [45] Legrain 1921: 1.
- [46] Legrain 1921: n. 279; Amiet 1994: 4, fig. 3; 1997: fig. 6; Winkelmann 1997: fig. 1g; 2000: fig. 25; Ascalone 2005b: fig. 18c.
- [47] Ascalone 2005b: fig. 20; 2006: fig. 17c-d.
- [48] Hakemi 1997a: 255, obj. n. 2263.
- [49] Pottier 1913: pl. XLIV:1-2; Amiet 1966: fig. 134; 1986: 202, figs. 97: 1, 108.
- [50] Amiet 1974: 103, fig. 7; Hakemi 1972: n. 300; 1997a: 649, obj. n. 1049.
- [51] Hakemi 1997a: 444, obj. n. 3322 and 353, obj. n. 2229.
- [52] Amiet 1986: 169, fig. 127.
- [53] Madjidzadeh 2003: 170-171.
- [54] de Mecquenem 1934: 214, fig. 58.
- [55] de Mecquenem 1946: 78.
- [56] Tallon 1987: fig. 6a-b.
- [57] Calmeyer 1969: 182, figs. 151-152; Curtis 1988.

- [58] Hakemi 1972: pl. XX; 1973b: 66; 1997a: 638, Gp. 8; Amiet 1973: 27.
- [59] Amiet 1976b: 21, n. 29; 1977: pl. V; M.H. Pottier 1984: nn. 53-67, 69-71; Sarianidi 1977a: figs. 64-65; 1977b: 138, fig. 2.
- [60] Amiet 1986: 163-164, fig. 96: 4-5e cf. Tosi 1970: 36, fig. 17 and Hakemi 1973b: 26; Tallon 1987: 95-96, nn. 72-77.
- [61] Amiet 1973: 26; 1976a: fig. 7.
- [62] Tosi 1970: 46-47, fig. 17a.
- [63] Deshayes 1960: n. 1,548.
- [64] Deshayes 1960: n. 1,554.
- [65] Deshayes 1960: n. 3,105.
- [66] Tallon 1987: 174, n. 532.
- [67] Madjidzadeh 2003: 158.
- [68] Casal 1961: 249, fig. 139: 9.
- [69] Deshayes 1960: n. 1,847.
- [70] Amiet 1966: fig. 152: a-b; 1986: 125-126, fig. 96: 7-9.
- [71] Cf. Madjidzadeh 2003: 144, 146.
- [72] de Mecquenem 1934: 189, fig. 21; Le Breton 1957: 117-18, figs. 39-40; Amiet 1966: figs. 151-153.
- [73] Amiet 1986: 127.
- [74] D.T. Potts 2002: 345-351; see also Steinkeller 2013; 2014.
- [75] On the role of Iran in the inter-regional exchange of metal see Steinkeller 2016.
- [76] Ascalone 2007: tab. 1.
- [77] Miroshedji 1973.
- [78] Amiet 1974: 97; Tallon 1987: nn. 1, 249-250
- [79] de Mecquenem 1934: 210, fig. 53: 3; 1946: 85; Amiet 1966: 260, fig. 189; 1986: 147, 201, figs. 97, 106 and cf. 199.
- [80] Amiet 1966: 156, fig. 112; 1986: 148, fig. 98; Spycket 1981: 124, pl. 87.
- [81] Amiet 1986: 147-148, figs. 97: 4, 101-102.
- [82] Amiet 1972: nn. 240, 1, 716-818; 1974: fig. 16.

[83] Amiet 1986: 146-147, 149, 176, fig. 89.

[84] Amiet 1986: 143, fig. 93; Ascalone - Peyronel 1999: 366; 2003: 358-359.

[85] Amiet 1986: 144, 148, fig. 95.

[86] de Mecquenem 1943: fig. 84: 7; Amiet 1986: 144, 147-149, figs. 92, 100.

[87] Amiet 1972: nn. 1720, 1722-1726.

[88] For the first cylinder seal (Sb 1383) see Rutten 1950: 175, pl. 5, n. 39; Amiet 1972: n. 2,021; 1986: tab. 90, fig. 6; Collon 1996: fig. 31b; Peyronel 2000: 204-206, 229, n. 6.1, fig. 6.3. The second (NMI 653) is published in Amiet 1972: n. 1,975; Amiet 1986: tab. 90, fig. 7; Amiet 1986c: 266, fig. 91; Collon 1996: fig. 31C; Peyronel 2000: 204-206, 229-30, n. 6.2.

[89] See firstly Scheil 1900: 129.

[90] Scheil 1916: 22.

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