

ANCIENT IRANIAN STUDIES

پژوهشنامه ایرانیان سیستان

Commercial and Cultural Relations of Sistan with Neighboring Areas during the 3rd Millennium BC

Author(s): Seyed Mansour Seyed Sajjadi

Source: Ancient Iranian Studies, July 2023, VOL. 2, NO. 6: 3-34.

Published by: Tissaphernes Archaeological Research Group

Stable URL:

https://www.ancientiranianstudies.ir/article_173519_5966fbc6f8497ffccfe30991d76202.pdf?lang=en



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Tissaphernes Archaeological Research Group, Tehran, Iran. [Open Access](#). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution,

and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The ethical policy of Ancient Iranian Studies is based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines and complies with International Committee of Ancient Iranian Studies Editorial Board codes of conduct. Readers, authors, reviewers and editors should follow these ethical policies once working with Ancient Iranian Studies. The ethical policy of Ancient Iranian Studies is liable to determine which of the typical research papers or articles submitted to the journal should be published in the concerned issue. For information on this matter in publishing and ethical guidelines please visit www.publicationethics.org.



Commercial and Cultural Relations of Sistan with Neighboring Areas during the 3rd Millennium BC

Seyed Mansour Seyed Sajjadi¹

Abstract

The commercial and cultural relations of Shahr-i Sokhta with neighboring areas have a relatively long and complex history. During the first period of Shahr-i Sokhta, there are many evidences indicating the connection of this large center with the south of Mesopotamia, Elam and the southern parts of the Iranian plateau. There was also an extensive connection between this center and Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Waziristan region that overlooks the Indus valley. Based on archeological evidence, in parallel with the emergence of the social and economic structure and the beginning of urbanization, we see a significant expansion of trade with distant regions.

Keywords: Sistan, Cultural Relations, Shahr-i Sokhta, Middle Asia.

¹ PhD of Archaeology, Director International Archaeological Expedition. Shahr-i Sokhta, Iran.  m_sajjadi@hotmail.com

Article info: Received: 30 January 2023 | Accepted: 9 March 2023 | Published: 1 July 2023

Citation: Seyed Sajjadi, Seyed Mansour. (2023). "Commercial and Cultural Relations of Sistan with Neighboring Areas during the 3rd Millennium BC". *Ancient Iranian Studies*, Vol. 2 (6): 3-34.

<https://doi.org/10.22034/AIS.2023.404141.1042>

Introduction

The commercial and cultural relations of Shahr-i Sokhta with neighboring areas such as the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Oman and Mesopotamia have a relatively long and complex history. During the first period of Shahr-i Sokhta, there are many evidences indicating the connection of this large center with the south of Mesopotamia, Elam and the southern parts of the Iranian plateau such as Tepe Yahya and Jiroft Valley. During this period, there were also an extensive connection between this center and Central Asia (Altin Tepe, Namazga), Afghanistan (Mundigak) and the Waziristan region that overlooks the Indus valley. Based on archeological evidence, in parallel with the emergence of the social and economic structure and the beginning of urbanization, we see a significant expansion of trade with distant regions. According to the said contents and a comparison presented in the paper, it can be concluded that Shahr-i Sokhta had all the necessary criteria to be a large and important center for the exchange of raw materials and the production of export goods.

However we must mention that basically, this paper doesn't intend to deal with matters relate to long distance commercial exchanges, but only tries to show some similarities between the finds from these neighboring sites. On the other hand, new finds are huge and diverse, and the debate over them requires surely another occasion.

Before entering into the main argument, a very short report can be seen on the excavations of this Bronze Age site in south eastern Iran (Figs. 1-2).

During last 20 archaeological campaigns at Shahr-i Sokhta, the researches of our expedition were concentrated on several fieldworks and research activities, mainly focused on the excavations

in residential areas (Fig. 3) including a zone called Monumental area unearthing a huge architectural structure with more than 120 spaces as rooms, open spaces and several small store rooms (Fig. 4) with thousands of different kind of objects and organic materials such as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (Fig. 5) as well as large collection of textiles and so on. In the same area in building No. 20 we faced with remains of a temple that according to the ceramic assemblage could be dated to phase 2 and 1 of respectively periods 3 and 4 dating to 2200-2000 BC. (Fig. 7).

Excavations at the central residential area were carried on in 5 different workshops, No. 26, where a geo-archaeological studies and a short archaeological survey on the surface have been carried out, and as a result a big complex of structure, very similar to the Bazars of Middle East has been found (Fig. 6).

At a cemetery, we excavated 1100 rich graves that contained a large volume of data, with the most surprising find, i.e. the artificial eye found in the grave of a female (Figs. 8-9).

During the third millennium BC, Sistan and Southern Turkmenistan had extensive cultural and commercial exchanges. Geographically, both of these territories are located in the southeastern and northeastern Iranian Plateau and are considered part of Middle Asia.

Despite the size of the eastern part of the Iranian plateau, few archaeological activities have taken place there. Perhaps one of the reasons is the interpretation of Western archaeologists who basically considered the Iranian plateau a cultural transit point between two great civilizations: Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley.

A limited amount of investigations carried out in the region led to the recognition of the development and pro-

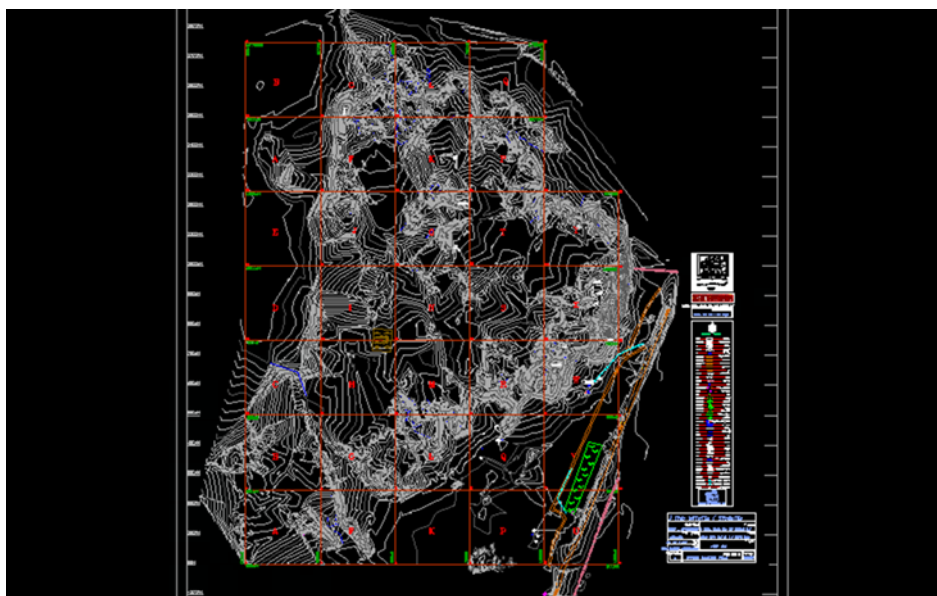


Fig. 1. Topographic Map of Shahr-i Sokhta (Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

motion of urbanism and to the identification of the socio-economic status of the large territories in the Iranian regions and the territories of Indo-Iranian borders from the 4th millennium BC to the 2nd millennium BC, between the two other great civilizations: Mesopotamia and the Indus valley. This is a vast area that runs from the Aral Lake in the north to the coast of the Makran Sea in the south. The southernmost part of Middle Asia, the offshore of Makran Sea, which is now under water, has progressed in the glacial era at sea, and it had probably been a suitable place for human communities during the Paleolithic Era. Lithic industries have been identified there, related to the Middle Paleolithic period, in the southern parts of the region of Lesbela on the borders between Baluchistan and Sindh, and also

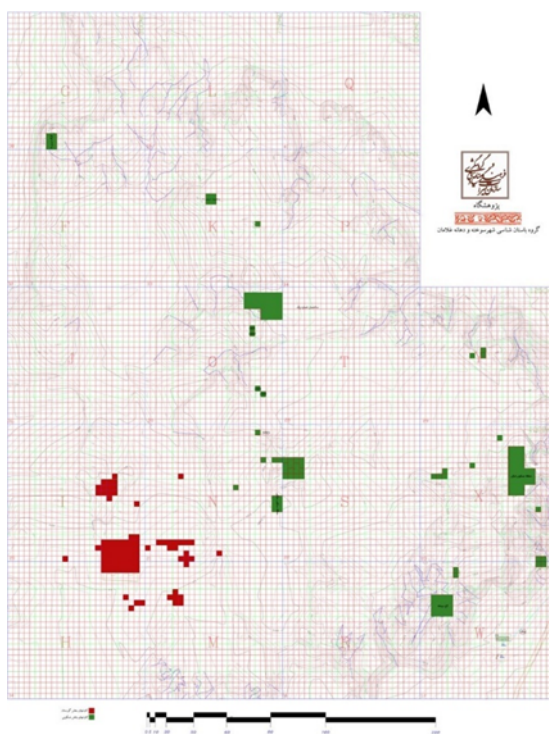


Fig. 2. The Red Color in The Diagram Represents Excavated Squares at Graveyard. The Green Color: Shows Excavated Squares at Residential Areas (Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

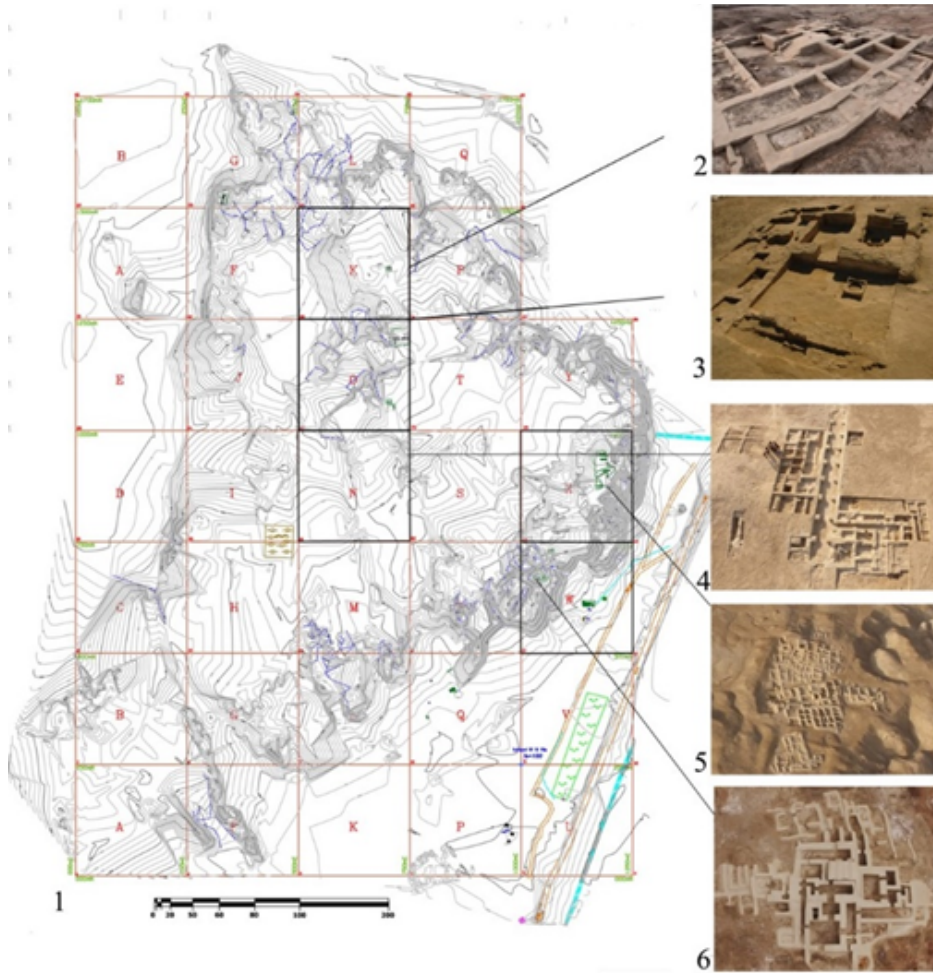


Fig. 3. Distribution of Main Buildings (Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

in the southeastern tip of the Baluchistan Highlands; some of them have been attributed to the Pleistocene Era (Sajjadi, 2009).

In the vast geographical area of Middle Asia, in addition to the Hirmand River Delta, there are at least five other main cultural regions

1. The southern region with Bampur as the center.
2. The eastern region with Mundi-gak as the center.
3. The southeastern region with Mehrgarh as the center.

4. The southern hillsides of the Alborz Mountains with Tepe His-sar as the center.

5. The northern region, Turkmenistan, with Altyn Tepe and Namazga as the main sites.

Southern area No. 1

The main site of this region is Bampur. Sir Aurel Stein was the first archaeologist to visit Baluchistan during his long journeys from China to Iran, recording and studying the sites. Beatrice De Cardi began the first new activities there in 1965 by excavating two



Fig. 4. Building 1 (Photo Media Rahmani. Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)



Fig. 5. Two Female Figurines. Upper Line: Grave No. 9140. Lower line: Building No. 1 (Photo: Media Rahmani)



Fig. 6. Building No. 26 (Photo Media Rahmani. Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

small test trenches in Bampur (De Cardi, 1970). Other important activities in Baluchistan include the archaeological surveys of

Ladiz, Khash, Sedich and Damen (Tosi 1970; Sajjadi, 2004; 2009) and the important surveys of Moradi-Sarhadi (Moradi *et al.*, 2014).

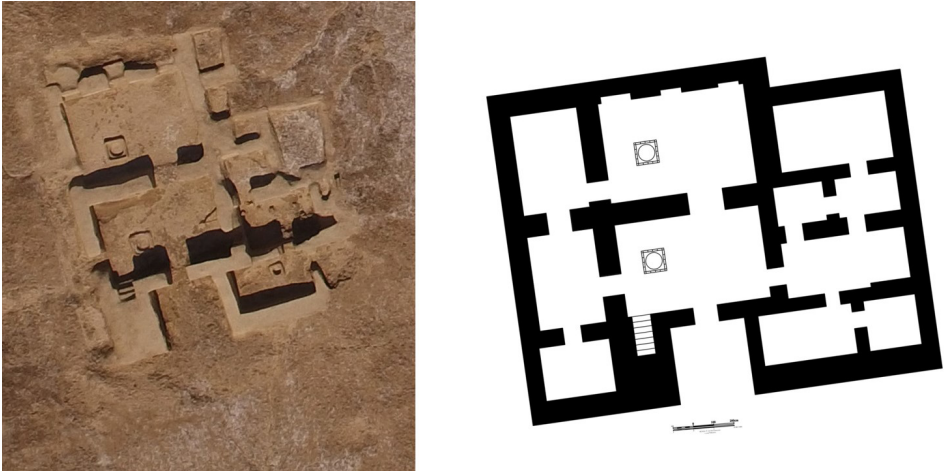


Fig. 7. Building No. 20 with 2 Very Large Fireplaces (Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)



Fig. 8. The Location of the Cemetery on the Site (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

The scattered test trenches were dug in some ancient sites provide information to illustrate the socio-economic condition of the region during the 4th and 3rd millenniums BC. The most important of these sites are Bampur, Khurab and Damen. De Cardi's excavations in Bampur identified six periods of occupation between the second quarter of the 3rd millennium BC and about 1900 BC. The potteries of

Bampur I are gray and red ware with Buff slip coating which lasted to the Bampur II period. The pottery of Bampur III is similar to those of northern Baluchistan, especially Sistan and Mundigak IV in Afghanistan, while the pottery of Bampur IV is similar to the one of the cemetery in Sistan and Khurab. Finally the pottery of Bampur V is a type of incised gray ware and black ware on gray background, sim-



Fig. 9. The Central part of Cemetery (Photo: Hassan Zohuri)



Fig. 10. Above. Female Grave 8725. Below. Ceramic Object. Grave 9410 (Photo: Media Rahmani)



Fig. 11. Grave 6705 and Artificial Eye (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)
Fig. 12. Reconstruction of the Woman with Artificial Eyes (Photo: Media Rahmani)

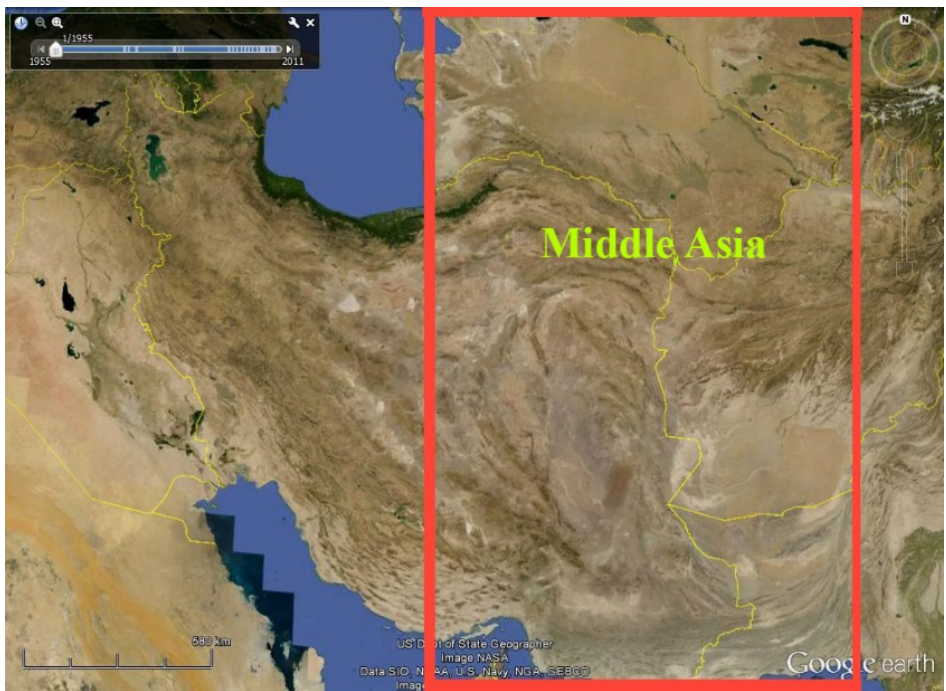


Fig. 13. Middle Asia



Fig. 14. Main Cultural Areas of Middle Asia

ilar to the ones of very unlikely distant places such as Qale'eh and Shoqa in Fars province and the Kulli ware in Makran. One of the most prominent features of this period is the use of sea shells and, consequently, the existence of a connection with the offshore of Makran Sea. The pottery of Bampur VI is local and influenced by previous periods, a kind of black ware pottery on a gray background similar to the one from Umm al-Nar in Oman, which is a sign of the connection between Bampur and the Berber period on the southern bank of the Persian Gulf in Bahrain. The existence of permanent water resources, and in particular the Bampur River and the Jazmuryan terminal lake in the region, allowed the use of sedimentary lands around the river and the banks of the lake to the farmers and agrarians of the 3rd millennium BC. On the other hand, Bampur's geographical location in a natural crossroad made it possible to link this site with others from

prehistoric times. Bampur was one of the rare Baluchistan points with sufficient water resources and was a natural center of the south and west of Baluchistan, but in comparison with sites such as Shahr-i Sokhta, Shahdad and Tepe Yahya, it had limited economic and cultural connections with other centers. At the same time, one of the reasons for the population growth in the Bampur valley in the 3rd millennium BC can be attributed to the effects of "importing" different cultural phenomena from other areas of the region, including Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi, 2009).

Eastern Region No.2

Mundigak is the largest archaeological site in central Afghanistan, located in the vicinity of Qandahar and is the main site of region No. 2. The seven distinguished occupational periods in Mundigak indicate 3,000 years of occupation from the beginning of the 4th Millennium to the

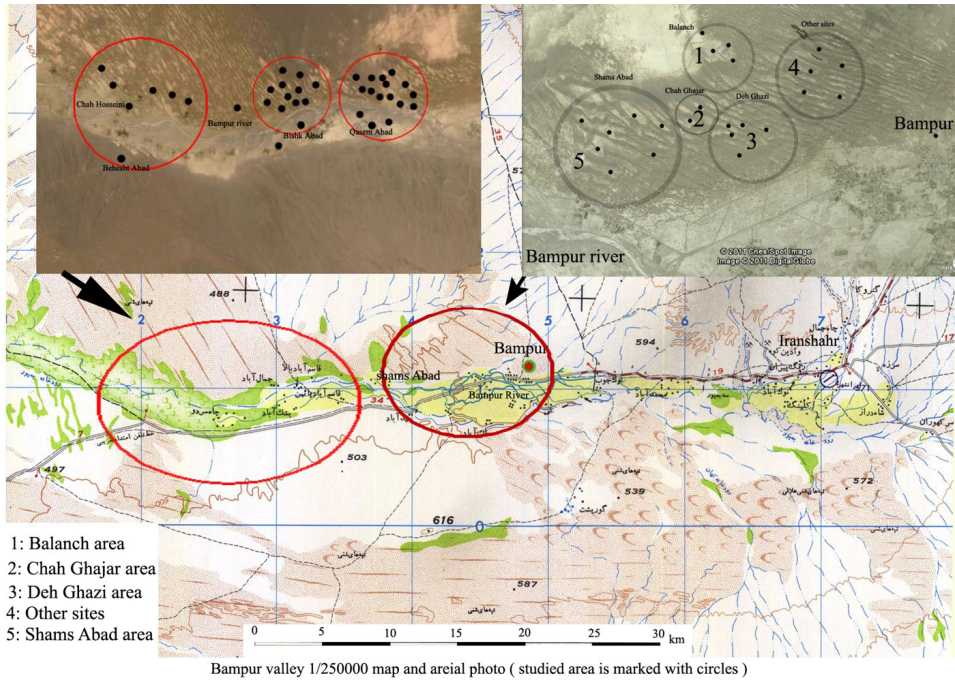


Fig. 15. Location of Main Protohistoric Sites at Bampur Valley (Moradi *et al.*, 2014).

2nd millennium BC. During this relatively long period, Mundigak transformed from a small village in periods I-III into a large city in the periods IV-V and then was abandoned during the Iron Age. The layers of all phases are found on the main tepe or hill A but residential houses and public structures were established on the elevations around the main site too.

Based on architectural structures and cultural phases, the first occupational phase in Mundigak was divided into 5 separate sub-phases. Due to the limited size of the trenches, the information from the earlier layers of Phase I is little and imperfect. There were no visible traces of constructions in these layers and it seems that people probably lived in tents or huts. The first significant architectural traces are two walls, found in the third sub-phase of Phase I, while the first mud bricks appeared in the Phase I₄₋₅. The main structures of this layer were 2 x 3 m

rooms. The walls of the rooms were built with one or two rows of mud bricks side by side, with each room having an entrance. Substantial changes took place in the structure of the following layers. The foundation of the walls was a mixture of stone and *pise* under the floor that helped strengthen the stability of the buildings. The geometric shape of the rooms in this phase remained in the form of a square, and the passages between the rooms brought the possibility of moving from one to another. From this sub-phase, two *pise*-built ovens have been found. The architecture of Phase I₅ was very strong and continued in Phase IV.

Period II is divided into three separate phases. Walls were made with mud bricks and their foundations were filled with *pise* or remains of the walls from the previous period. The rooms were squared and the first windows appeared, but unlike the previous period, the main room

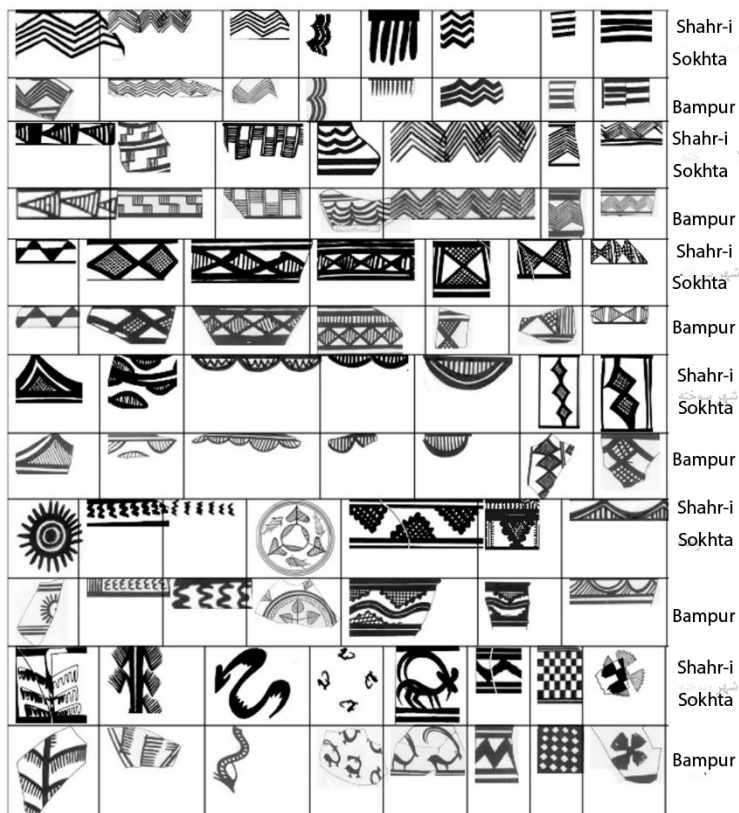


Fig. 17. The Comparison of Tepe Bampur and Shahr-I Sokhta Decorative Motifs (Sajjadi, 2022: Fig. 49)

was divided into two sections, small and big. The number of structures in the second period was larger than that of the previous period and there were also more open spaces. In the northern part of these structures, a well was dug, 1 meter in diameter and 8 meters in depth. The outer edge of the well was built with mud bricks, while its inner body was covered with mud plaster. The entire section that separated the well from the building was covered with stone. South of the well there was also a small open space with a square oven, which certainly was related to the use of the well itself.

The remains of Period III were built on Period II. Although Period III included some cultural changes, in terms of

stratigraphy and architecture it was the continuation of Period II. The mud brick structures of this period were generally similar to those of the previous one, but the number of two-part, large and small rooms had been reduced. There are more architectural remains than in previous periods and one of the reasons might be the greater number of excavated areas. Usually, the increase in buildings indicates an increase in population, but it is not certain that they were residentially occupied. In the third period, the works of reconstruction, annexation and renovation were observed. Many of the buildings had a common wall and this can be interpreted as a public use of them. The buildings usually had a small entrance

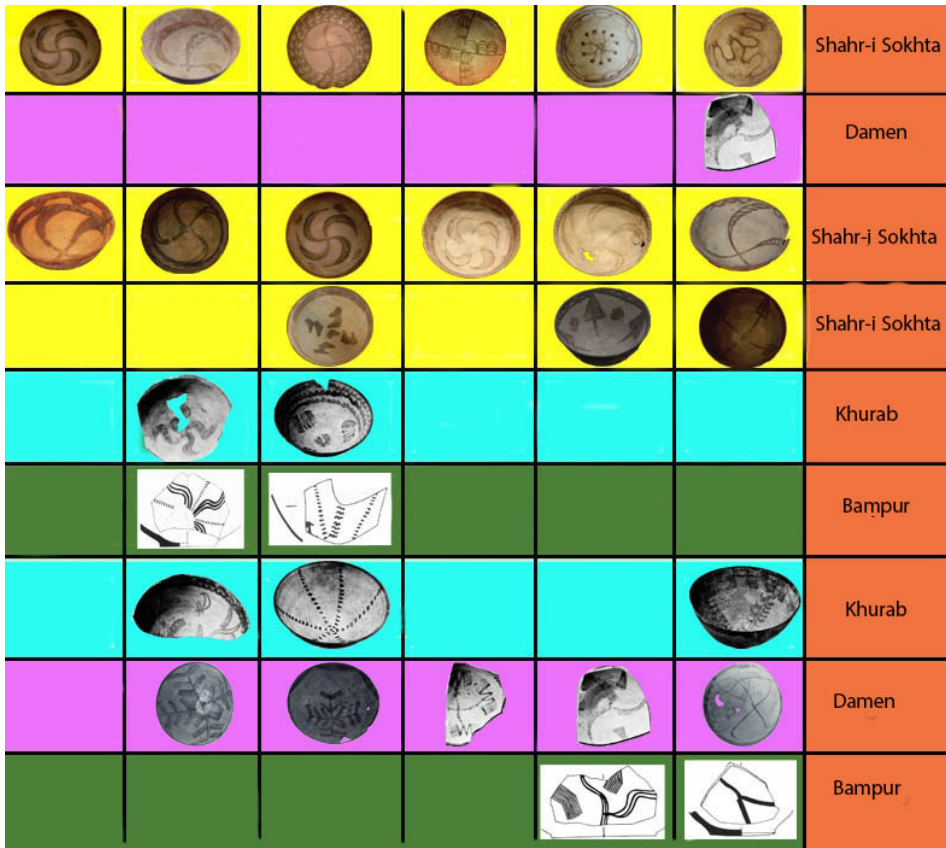


Fig. 18. The Comparison of Shahr-I Sokhta and Area 1 Pottery (Casal, 1961)

and sometimes the access to the rooms was from the ceiling. An interesting point was that almost all the rooms that had a side entrance also had a square oven. In one of the square rooms, the construction method of the roofs was visible. Through the upper part of the walls, there were stair and triangular holes, in which the remains of the roof beams were found. The Period III buildings also had a window. In this period, as in the previous one, in one of the open spaces, three wells were excavated into the virgin soil, but unlike the well of Period II, there was no structure on the body of the well. Another interesting phenomenon is the existence of a brick pillar in one of the rooms and a series of sitting platforms

around one of the other rooms in the fourth layer of this period. The floor of many structures was about 25 cm below the floor of the surrounding area. Another architectural feature is the smaller size entrance doors, which in some cases are less than a meter in height.

The division of the Period IV into three phases was due to the differences among the potteries. In Period IV₁, a huge building called “Palace” was found and consequently this phase was named as the “Palace Period”. The ‘Palace’ was built on Hill A. It is a large building with semi-columns, renovated several times. The use of the term Palace was due to its magnitude and semi-columns without any other reason for this designation, but

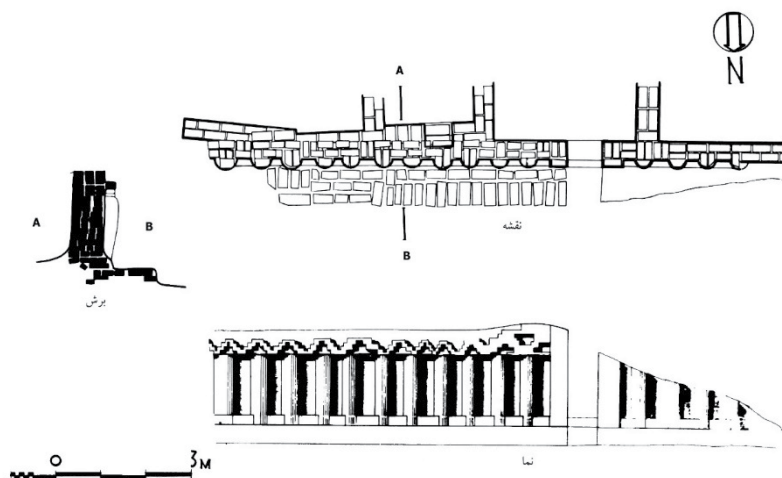


Fig. 18. The Comparison of Shahr-I Sokhta and Area 1 Pottery (Sajjadi, 2019. Fig. 43)

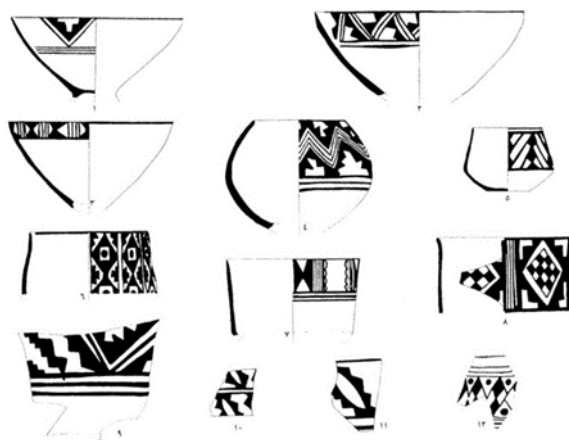


Fig. 20. Mundigak: Quette Ware Pottery (Casal, 1961)

there is no doubt that it was a monumental/ public building distinct from its contemporary structures.

A huge building was found on Hill G, east of Hill A, and it was named the Temple. In the western part of this large building there was an empty space or a courtyard. In the north of this courtyard there was a large pond. The land adhering to the pond was covered with ash, and behind it a brick water duct was made in the east-west direction between the main

wall and a smaller L-shaped wall. The smaller wall led to a small room which was like a temple sanctuary (*Mihrab*). In the southeast of the same wall, there was a large rectangular structure with white color benches. There was also a bench along the eastern wall. In the middle of the altar-like chamber there was a large rectangular red oven, and in the western part there was a small staircase. The size and area of the eastern rooms are varied and some of them have ovens. Although

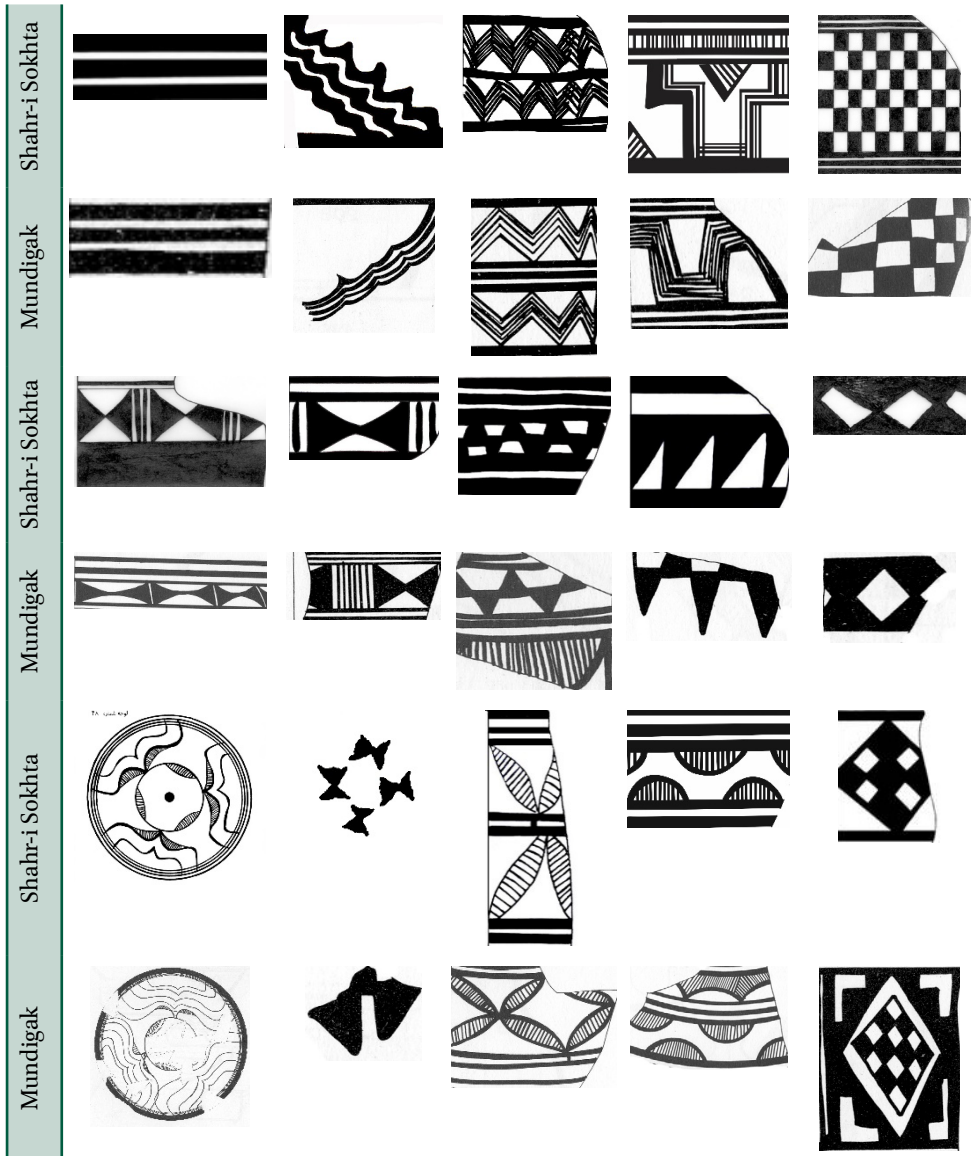


Fig. 21. The Comparison of Shahr-i Sokhta Decorative Motifs with Mundigak

there are insufficient reasons to consider this building as a temple, it certainly was not a private residential place. Whatever the use of this building, it was very different from the others. During Period V on the hill, on the remains of the palace and of earlier periods, a huge building was built, whose function has not been un-

derstood yet, but there is no doubt that this structure was not a private building either. Here, there is no sign of any elements needed for a residential house, and on the other hand it is not clear whether its rooms were covered by roofs or if they were some open space units. The only interpretation relates to a place

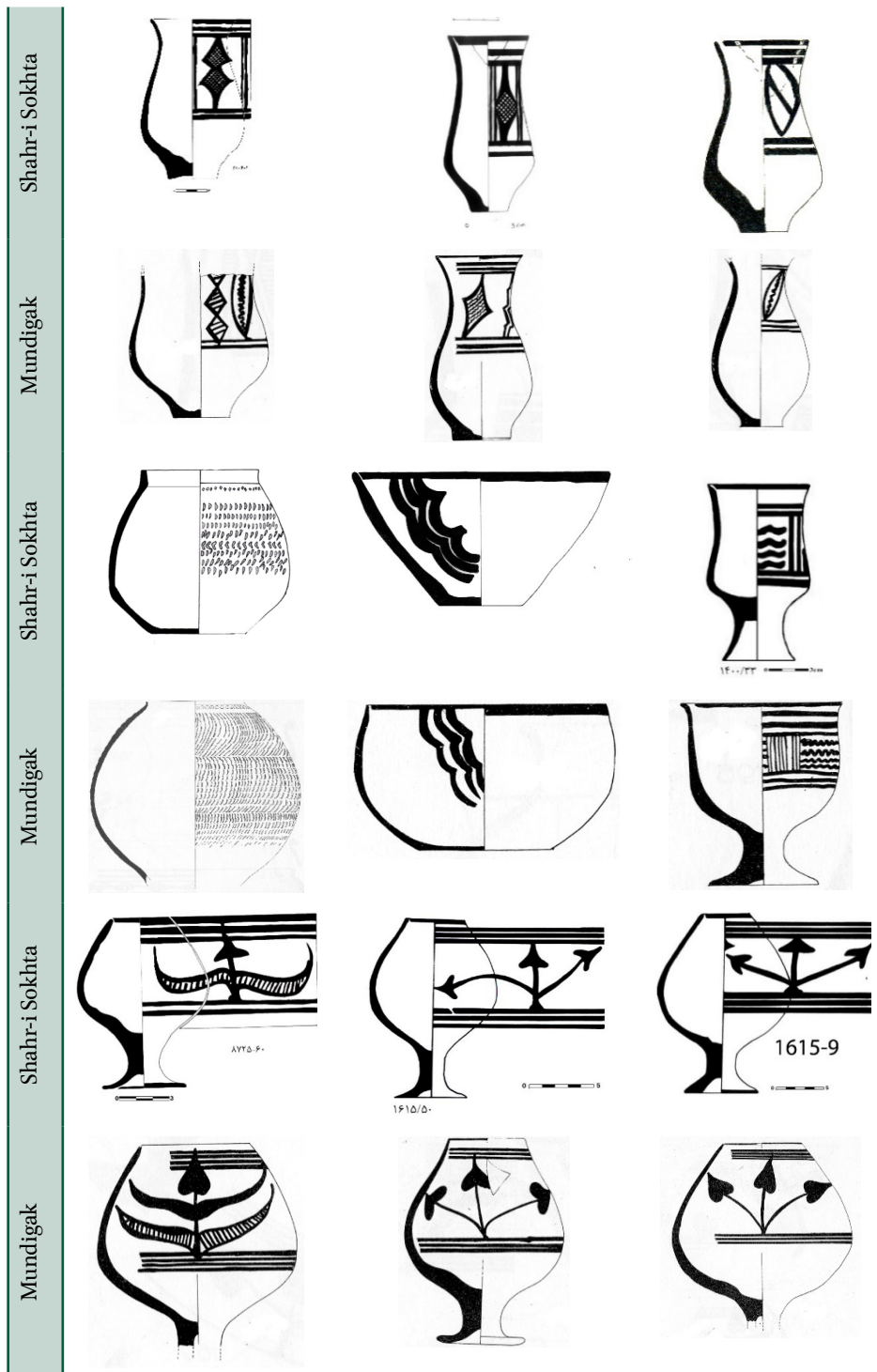


Fig. 22. The Comparison of Shahr-i Sokhta Pottery Vessels with Mundigak.

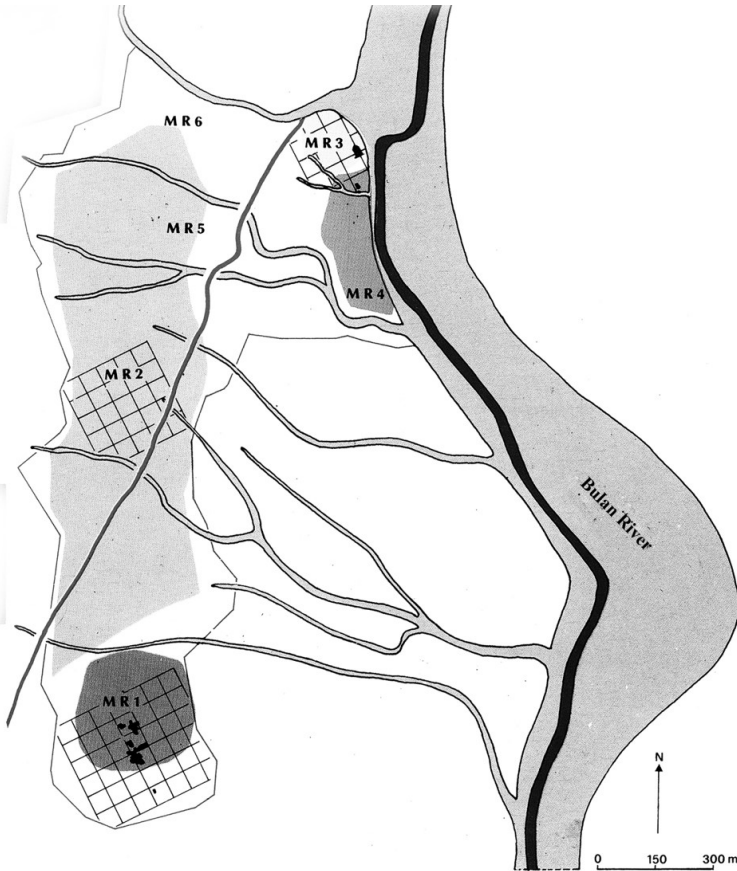


Fig. 23. Mehrgarreh: The Set of Archaeological Sites (AA.VV, 1980).

probably dedicated to human sacrifices. On a platform, right outside the building, some human bones have been found, including the jaw of a child. Undoubtedly, most of the problems with the interpretation of the use of these buildings are due to the very high erosion of the upper layers that destroyed evidences. The site was probably occupied from the late 4th millennium to the early 1st millennium BC (Casal, 1961).

Southeast Region No.3

with Mehrgarreh as the main site. This prehistoric site is located in the Quetta Valley in Pakistan's Baluchistan. Mehrgarreh was occupied from the Neolithic

Period (7th Millennium BC) to the end of the Bronze Age (3rd Millennium BC). Here, from the earlier layers of pre-pottery, the evolution of an economy based on agriculture can be seen. In these layers, whose architectural remains were limited to the square houses built with mud bricks, there are traces of wild animals together with a small amount of bones of semi-domesticated goats. Other traces of this period were seen in the graves of the beginning of the 7th millennium BC.

During this period, dead bodies were buried with gifts in a separate cemetery, grave goods consisted of tools and decorative objects made of aquatic crusta-

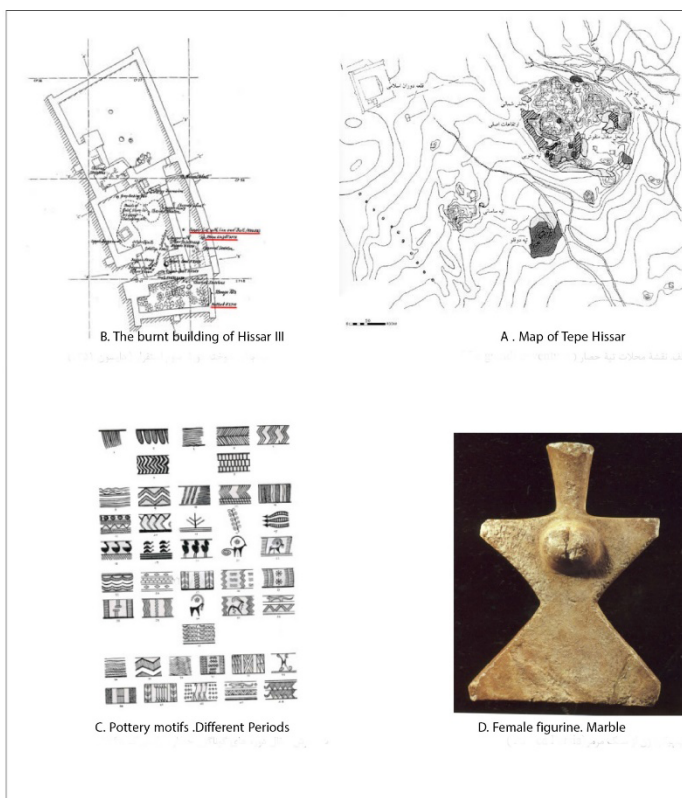


Fig. 24. Tepe Hissar, A. Grande Aventura; B. Dyson, 1972; C. Vanden Berghe, 1956; D. Antica Persia, 1980.

ceans and objects made of semi-precious stones, such as turquoise and lapis lazuli. From the beginning of the sixth millennium BC, changes in the type of cereals occurred, the hunting of wild animals was abandoned and was substituted by the breeding of cattle, in particular humped bull. In this millennium, several rectangular structures were built by mud bricks and they were probably used as grain silos (Jarrige & LeChavallier, 1979).

Certainly, as in many archaeological sites of Iran, making pottery at Mehrgarh had begun in the middle of the 6th millennium BC. From the 5th Millennium BC onward, the potteries were decorated with geometric patterns, and later the animal designs of Kili Gul Mohammad Ware and the slow wheel were also used,

while the use of the fast wheel was privileged before 4000 BC. In later periods, the development and use of copper replaced microlithic industry and bone tools. In the cemetery of the Chalcolithic period and among gift objects, tools were not observed and they were replaced by decorative objects, especially soap stone and lapis lazuli necklaces (see MehrAfarin, 2002). During the 4th and 3rd millennium BC, pottery works became greatly privileged, and many furnaces have been found. From the middle of 4th millennium BC, a new kind of pottery found throughout the Baluchistan region of Pakistan, known as Kechi Beg Ware, and around 3000 BC, potters of the region produced a kind of pottery that was almost gray, with designs similar to Quatta



Fig. 25. The Comparison of Tepe Hissar's Cultural Materials with Bactriana & Magiana Archaeological Complex (V. I. Sarianidi, 1998)

Ware. Simultaneously, a very significant amount of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines appeared and they were more natural-looking than those of the Neolithic times (Seyed Sajjadi, 2009).

Eight distinct periods of occupation are identified at Mehrgarh. These periods are scattered over a large area: Period I in MR3 includes the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN), Period II in MR4 around MR3 covers the Neolithic (PN) phases and the Copper Age, Period III in MR2 covers an area of approximately 900 square meters. Periods IV - VII were found in the main area, MR1, and finally Period VIII was discovered in the cemetery in the south of MR1 in Sibri, 8 km from the main site (AA. VV. 1980).

Area No.4

The hillsides of the Alborz Mountains with Tepe Hissar as the center. The two main cultural regions (which can be divided into smaller sections) are located in the northeastern and eastern regions of Iran, with the remains of the most ancient urban civilizations in eastern Iran in sites of 10 to 12 hectares and a population of 2,000 to 3,000, with a number

that fluctuated throughout the years. In the semi-arid oasis of Damqan the only notable site is Tepe Hissar, which at the end of the 4th millennium BC was about 12 hectares, while in the hot plains of Gorgan and near the southern shores of the Caspian Sea with Turang Tepe as the center, the number of recorded sites with 20 hectares is about 100. This area can be called as the Intercultural Zone, which has been characterized by the production of high-quality pottery. If we go further to the east, around the Atrak River, in the plains and hillsides at the north of the Kopet Dag Mountains, there are settlements set up one after another within 500 kilometers and among them are wealthy settlements such as Namazga, Ulogh Tepe, and Altyn Tepe. Each of these settlements has a size of 30 to 40 hectares during the Chalcolithic period, each of which was enclosed by smaller villages.

Tepe Hissar is one of the most important archaeological sites in northern Iran during the late Neolithic and the early Chalcolithic periods. At this site, there are three distinct occupation periods that are divided into several phases. Low-

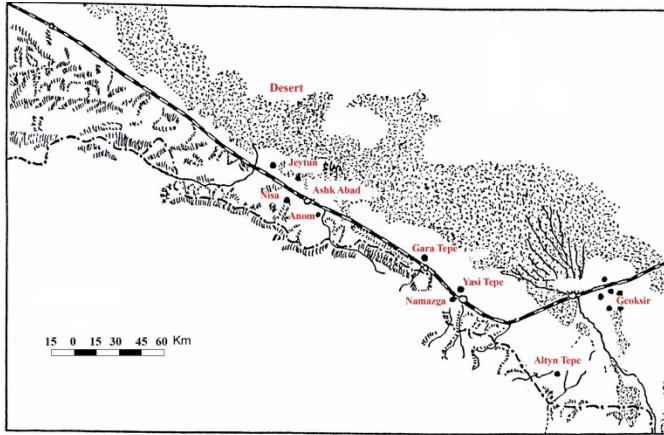


Fig. 26. Distribution of Archaeological Sites in Area 5 (Framukin, 1970).

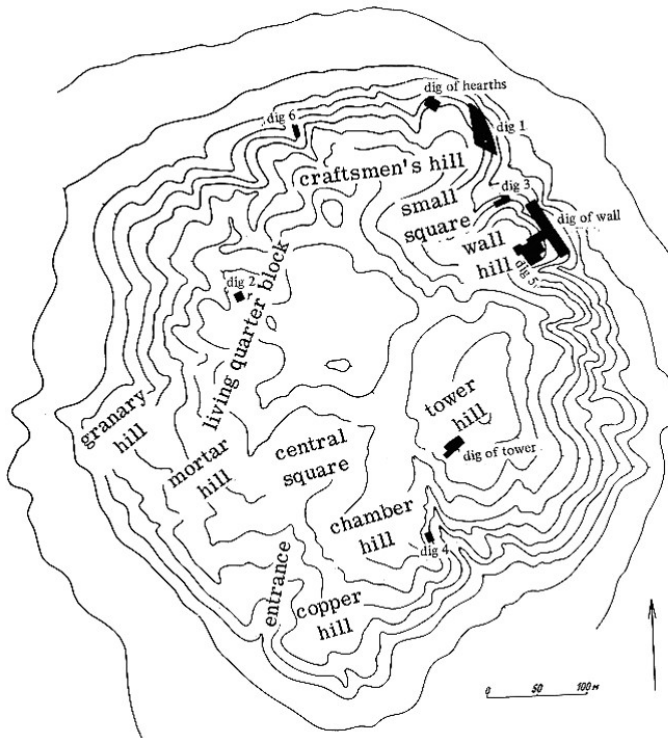


Fig. 27. Altyn Tepe (Kohl, 1984)

er layers of Hissar I indicate the continuation periods of settlement in this area, which began with the Sang-Chakhmaq Tepe. It seems that the area during this period is more oriented toward the central regions of Iran, such as Tepe Sialk,

than toward the north. The oldest recorded phase is Hissar IA, which around 6500-6100 BP had rectangular buildings of mud brick and *pise*, with lathered walls and internal ovens. They buried the dead under the floor of the rooms and placed

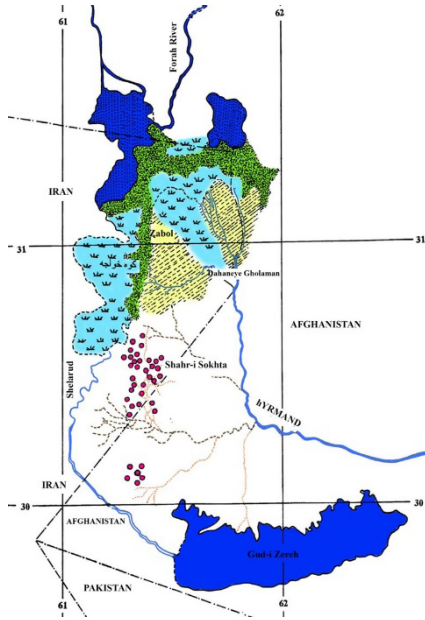


Fig. 28. Shahr-I Sokhta and Location of Prehistoric Sites in Sistan (adapted after Faireservis, 1961)

gifts with them. The pottery of this period is Fine Painted Ware. In the second phase, Hissar Ib, (6100-5700 BP), doors and windows of houses are evident and there was a new type of Coarse Painted Ware pottery, while metal and semi-precious stones were used as well. The pottery of period I and part of the pottery of period II was Buff Painted Ware designed by domestic animals.

Hissar II is divided into two phases. Through Hissar IIA, Buff Ware was substituted by Gray Ware. This Gray Ware pottery was also seen in other sites such as Turang Tepe, Shah Tepe and Yarim Tepe. In Hissar II, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, various decorative objects and copper tools were seen. During this period, 209 graves have been excavated. Hissar III is divided into three phases. Among the architectural remains, there was a large structure called Burnt Building, which had a defensive

wall and a gate and was thought to have been a big temple or a palace. The pottery of the first layer is Dark Gray Ware Pottery and other objects are of metal, bone and stone. In addition to metal objects and weapons, decorative objects of gold, silver and semi-precious stones were also obtained. One of the important features in Tepe Hissar was the use of burnished painted Gray Ware pottery.

Area No. 5

is in Southern Turkmenistan with Altyn Tepe as the main site. About 25 hectares of this important site of Neolithic to Bronze Age have been excavated. The earliest layers of this site belong to the Early Copper Age (5th millennium BC), and are of the Namazga I type, characterized by Painted Monochrome Ware with large triangular patterns. The Middle Copper Age (4th millennium BC) is characterized by the Yalangach type pottery found at Anau, a type of Painted Ware with parallel lines below the rim of the vessels along with anthropomorphic figurines and wall paintings. The Late Copper Age (from the last century of the 4th Millennium BC until the end of the 3rd millennium BC) is distinguished by Geoksyur Painted and Polychrome Ware. From this period, a defensive mud brick wall, several rectangular towers, and a significant number of sitting female figurines with big and oval shaped eyes, have been found.

After the introduction of wheel-made pottery in the Early Bronze Age (2800-2300 BC), painted Geoksyur Ware gradually started to disappear. At this time, punched stone seals with holes and wands with spiral heads appeared. The evolution of the Chalcolithic tradition ended during the Middle Bronze Age (2300-1850 BC), with the appearance of painted wheel-made pottery, dou-

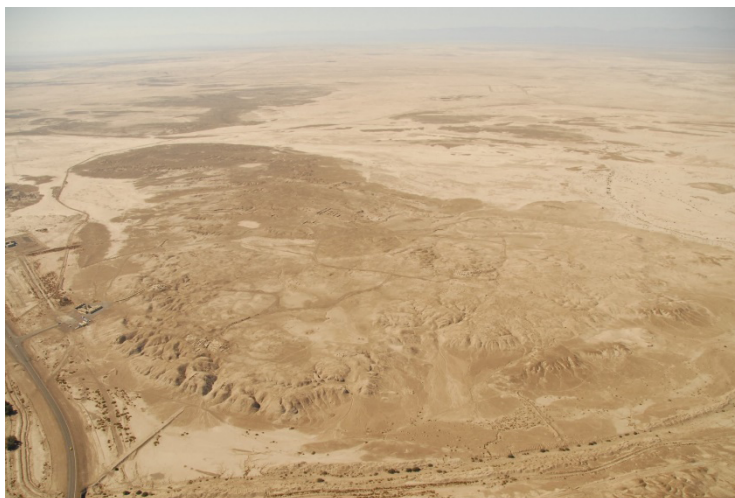


Fig. 29. Shahr-i Sokhta: Aerial Photo (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

ble-stages furnaces, female sitting figurines with spherical eyes, bronze and silver seals. A Craftsman Quarter was found at Altyn tepe, which is distinguished from the Nobile Quarter with its graves with gold, lapis lazuli and turquoise objects.

Altyn Tepe has a stepped tower and a very rich grave of a female monk with a golden statue of cattle. The Altyn Tepe architecture appears to be influenced by Mesopotamian architecture. Altyn Tepe was gradually abandoned, and it seems that its people migrated to the east, and formed other communities around Murghab (Kelleli and Auchin), along the Amu Darya in southern Uzbekistan (Sapalli) and in northern Afghanistan (Dashli) according to the the Altyn Tepe tradition.

Sistan

The remains of Shahr-i-Sokhta have shown that the city was the most important settlement of the area and was a main center of social, political, economic, and cultural activities of the whole region during the 3rd millennium BC. The presence of salt layers helped to preserve ar-

chaeological remains and organic materials. Among these materials, there were the remains of ropes, baskets and rugs, wooden objects, paints, textile and hair, along with pottery, stone, and metal objects. These remains are all indicative of the fact that this site was a local point for the preparation and distribution of raw materials and objects made for domestic use and external exports. This is also true for imported materials such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, as well as for local mines such as copper, diorite and marble.

Considered as a center or regional capital, with a vast region from Qandahar to the coast of Makran Sea under its control. This site established relations with other sites and ancient cities of the 3rd millennium BC of the east, west, north, and south, and was the capital and the center of the Cultural Area of Hirmand. Shahr-i Sokhta was not just an isolated city and not only had some cultural / commercial connections with the settlements of its subordinates but also established relations with far-away lands. The sphere of influence and the circumstances of the Hirmand River's cultural extension is significant in Protohistorical

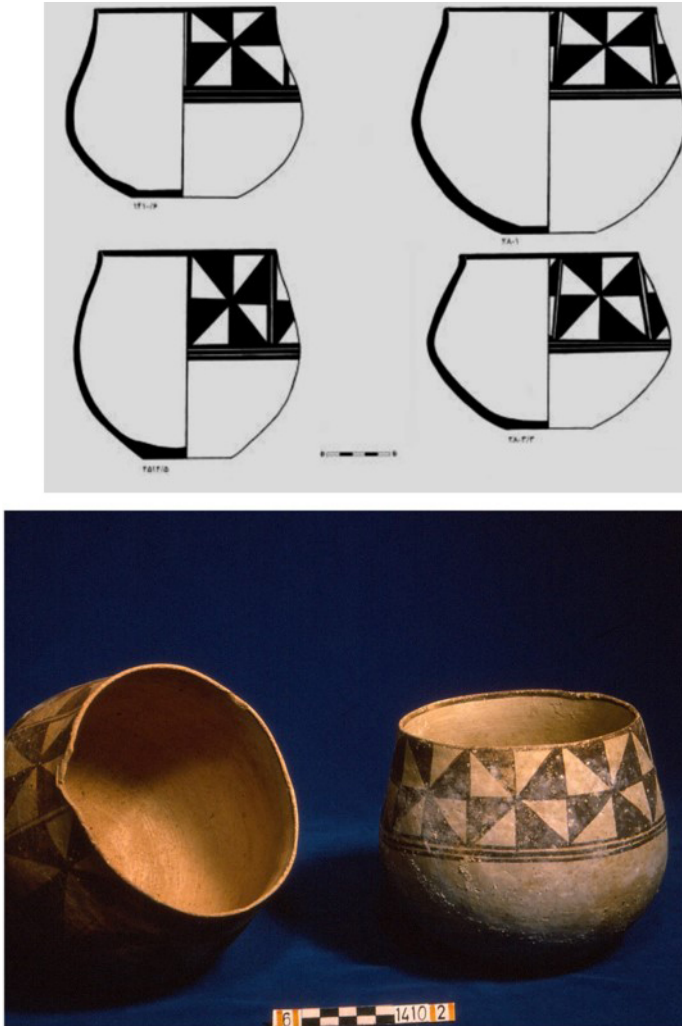


Fig. 30. Shahr-i Sokhta: Quetta Ware and Bow Tie Pottery (Namazga III), 3rd mill. BC. (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition)

periods. The extension of this culture is wider than regional powers, but is too limited to be called trans-regional power. It had relations with cultures of Middle Asia, such as Harappa in the east, Elam and Mesopotamia on the western Iranian Plateau (see Seyed Sajjadi & Moradi, 2022). The issue of commercial and cultural communications between Shahr-i Sokhta and distant areas such as the Indian subcontinent, Middle Asia and Oman is long and complex. There are many

indications that this city was linked not only to Mesopotamia and Elam, but also to southern parts of Iranian Plateau, such as Tepe Yahya. In this period, there were extensive relations between Shahr-i Sokhta and settlements of Southern Turkmenistan, such as Altyn Tepe, Namazga, Mundigak and also Wazirestan near the Indus Valley. During Period II, the establishment of works of full-time artisans is well documented. The most significant results from these excavations

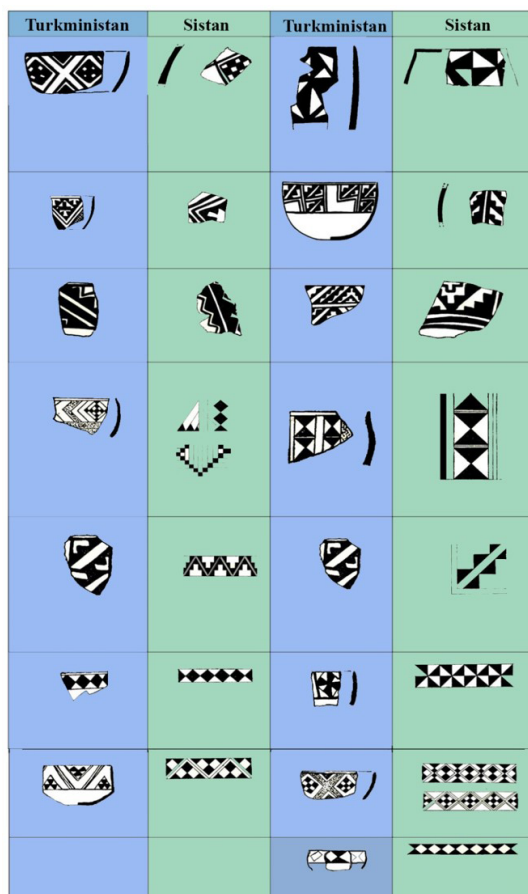


Fig. 31. Similarities and Comparisons between the Pottery Motifs of Shahr-i Sokhta and Turkmenistan (Sarianidi, 1983)

give meaning to the 4th and 3rd millennium cities of the Hirmand civilization. The discovery of a large amount of materials such as opal, lapis lazuli and turquoise, along with the tools, is evidence of an active market for these products in the city. Alabaster mines have been seen in the rocks of the Sistan Plain, but some other semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli and opal, have certainly been imported. More than 90% of lapis lazuli and opal of Shahr-i Sokhta are wastes, indicating the preliminary work and preparation of small and lightweight blocks of semi-precious stones to export. In fact, finding piles of scrap, chips, nuts

and semi-finished lapis lazuli, turquoise, onyx and other semiprecious stones in Shahr-i Sokhta and Tepe Hissar, along with diverse tools such as routers, blades and saws has brought the hypothesis that the site was a place for working on these stones.

The relations between Shahr-i Sokhta and southern Turkmenistan have been seen in various ways: making beads, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, metallurgical works, and particularly pottery vessels of the two regions.

The Quetta Ware pottery is one of the most prominent signs of the relations of the pottery of Shahr-i Sokhta with ar-

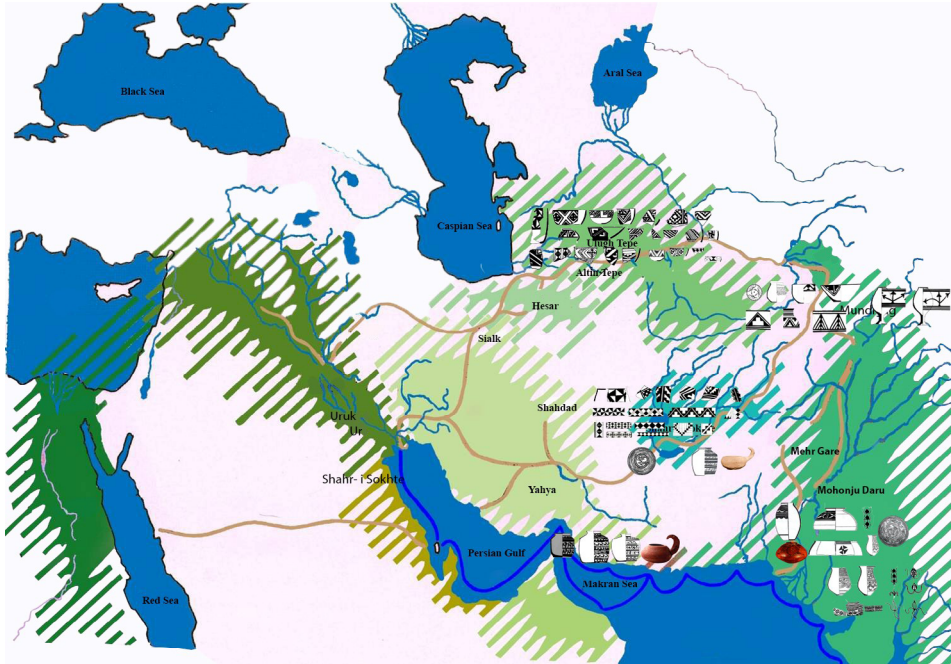


Fig. 32. The Pottery Connections between Shahr-i Sokhta and Areas No.1, 2,3 and 5 (Sajjadi, 2019: Fig. 59)

eas No 3 and 5, or Pakistani Baluchistan and southern Turkmenistan.

This type of pottery appeared in the domains of the Hyrmand and Arghandab rivers, in the layers of Mundigak III, Shahr-i Sokhta I and Namazga III in Southern Turkmenistan dated about 3000 BC. This pottery is the logical continuation of Namazga I-II pottery during the Middle and Early Neolithic Period. The first sample of Quetta Ware in Mundigak III is a buff color pottery with triangle motives that are joined to each other forming bow tie motifs. The presence of Quetta Ware in the lower layers of Shahr-i Sokhta is the reflection of the earliest phases of this pottery, but it's not possible to ignore the later influences of Southern Turkmenistan.

This kind of pottery in Mundigak and the Quetta Plain was made by wheels, but it was handmade in Shahr-i Sokhta I, like those of Geoksyur. This kind of

pottery was first identified by Professor Pigott in the Quetta Valley in Pakistan and then Masson found Namazga III buff ware similar to it. Later, its presence at Shahr-i Sokhta confirmed Masson's idea on the origin of this pottery. Quetta Ware was expanded to the Delta of the Hirmand River, along the Arghandab River in Mundigak III, and Southern Turkmenistan in Namazga III were about 3000 BC.

The similarities of pottery motifs between Southern Turkmenistan sites along Copet Dagh (such as the Murghab and Tejen Deltas) and the Sistan Plain are not limited to geometric designs, but also include zoomorphic motifs, although to a lesser extent.

The similarities between cultural materials of the deltas of Hamun, Tejen and Murghab are not limited to the pottery, but figurines, metal objects, seals and beads, burial practices and so on, are also considered as points of contact. The



Fig. 33. Shahr-i Sokhta. Zoomorphic Figurines (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition) (Sajjadi 2019: Fig. 65)



Fig. 34. Left. Painted Terracotta Cow Figurine. Right. Horse Terracotta Figurine (Photo: Media Rahmani)



Fig. 35. Shahr-i Sokhta. Anthropomorphic Figurines (Photo: Shahr-i Sokhta Archaeological Expedition) (Sajjadi, 2019: Fig. 63)



Fig. 36. Female Figurines from Ilgynlli (Above Left Side) and Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi, 2019: Fig. 66)

chronological distribution of the alabaster of Shahr-i Sokhta shows that a significant percentage of alabaster objects have been found in the graves of Periods I and II. This probably indicates that the pro-

duction of such objects was privileged during these periods. In Period III, the production decreased to 12%. More than 90% of the graves had only one alabaster object and only 10% of graves had two,

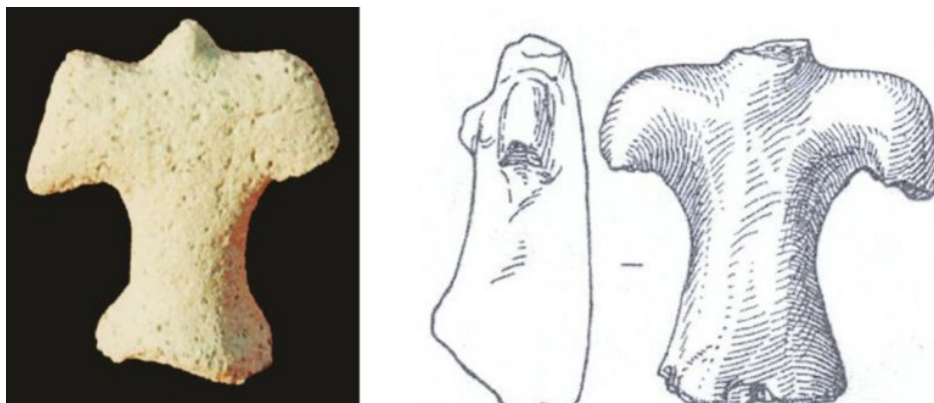


Fig. 37. Male Figurines from Shahr-I Sokhta (Left Side) .(Sajjadi, 2019. Fig. 62) and Altyn Tepe (Kircho; Korbokova and Masson, 2008: Fig. 11).

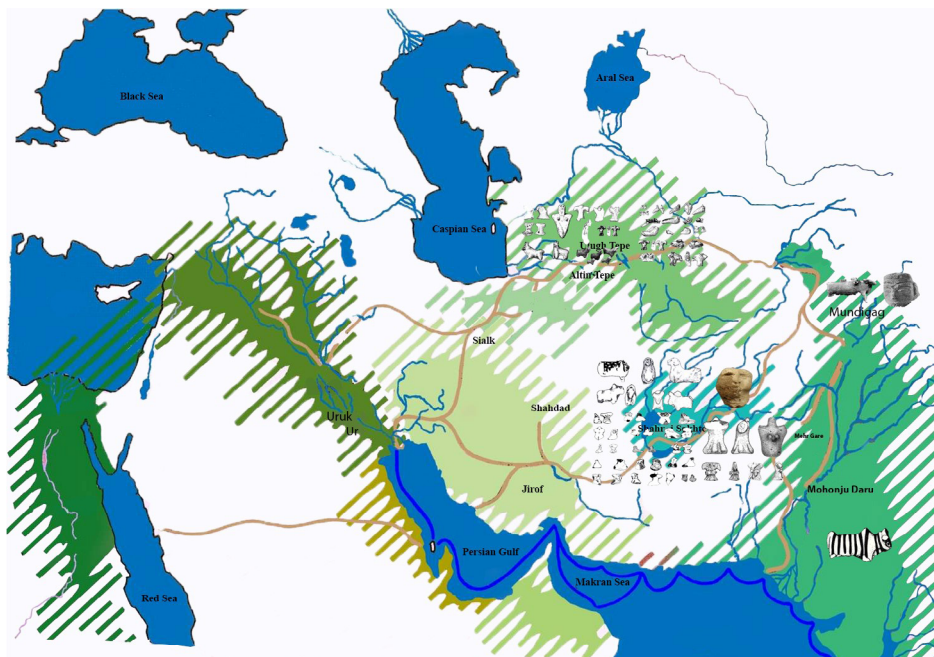


Fig. 38. The Similarities Between Figurines of Shahr-I Sokhta and Areas No. 3 and 5 (Sajjadi, 2019: Fig. 67)

three or four items. According to the statistics of alabaster objects found in Shahr-i Sokhta, it is deduced that during the first half of the 3rd millennium BC, on the Eastern Iranian Plateau, this site was one of the main sources of this material. Shahr-i Sokhta's alabaster items were distributed not only in the markets of neighboring areas, but were also ex-

ported to distant regions such as Susa, Mesopotamia and the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf. Aside from Susa and Mesopotamia, such objects have been found in Central Asia in Ulugh Tepe, Altyn Tepe, Geoksyur, Munchag, Southern Bactriana, Quetta and the Makran Sea. According to the available data, the distribution of alabaster objects was equal

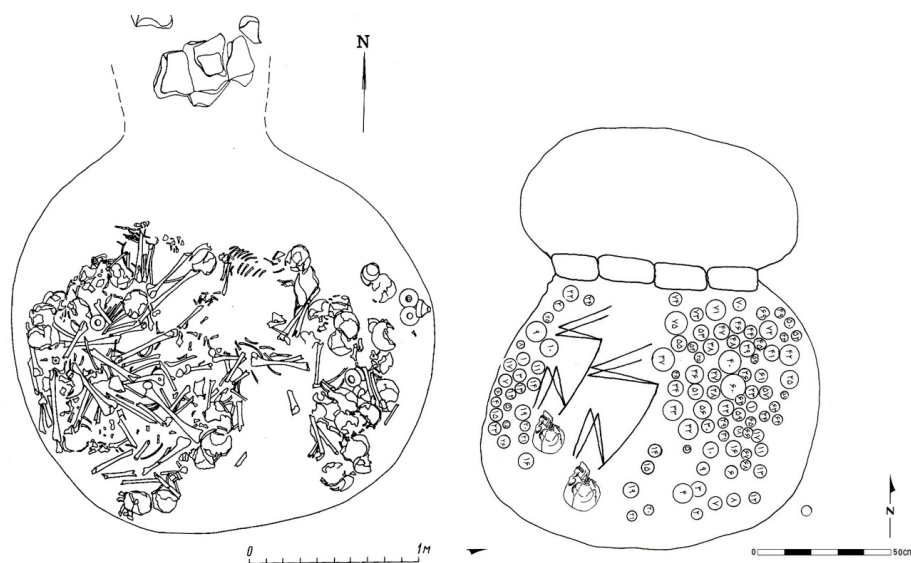


Fig. 40. Left. A Catacomb Grave from Parkhai III (Khlopin, 1981); Right. Catacomb Grave 1404. Shahr-i Sokhta

their use for sealing stores or storage containers. Seal impressions on smaller vessels with very small volumes are also found in the form of rounded and sealed clay disks. Seal motifs are often geometric and have circular, rectangular, or square shapes, but among them, there are other seals bearing plant, animal or bird motifs.

The similarities between Shahr-i Sokhta and neighboring territories, especially areas No. 2 and 5, are not limited to the remains of materials, but also include grave goods and tools, according to the social status of individuals (between Area No. 5 and Shahr-i Sokhta). Various kinds of foods and gifts, such as bracelets, necklaces, anklets and so on, were deposited in the graves. Structurally, aside from the simple pit graves that were common in the entire ancient world, there are similarities between several other grave shapes between Shahr-i Sokhta and other centers of Middle Asia. The most notable are catacombs and pseudo cata-

combs, which were then prevalent across Central Asia, and used in Shahr-i Sokhta for family burials of tribal leaders. This group of graves was used in Middle Asia from the late 3rd millennium BC.

Other types of graves shared between the two areas were circled and probably roofed collective graves. The most prominent example in Shahr-i Sokhta is burial No. 1003 with 12 human skulls placed beside the grave wall and one complete skeleton of a 45-year-old man in the center along with a complete skeleton of a dog and the skulls of two other dogs (Piperno & Salvatori, 2007). It is one of the oldest graves of the site that shows the immigration of people from Southern Turkmenistan to Shahr-i Sokhta. In fact, it seems that this tomb has been repeatedly opened to put other corpses in it.

As mentioned before, relations between Sistan and Southern Turkmenistan were not limited to cultural materials or the exchange of objects and products,

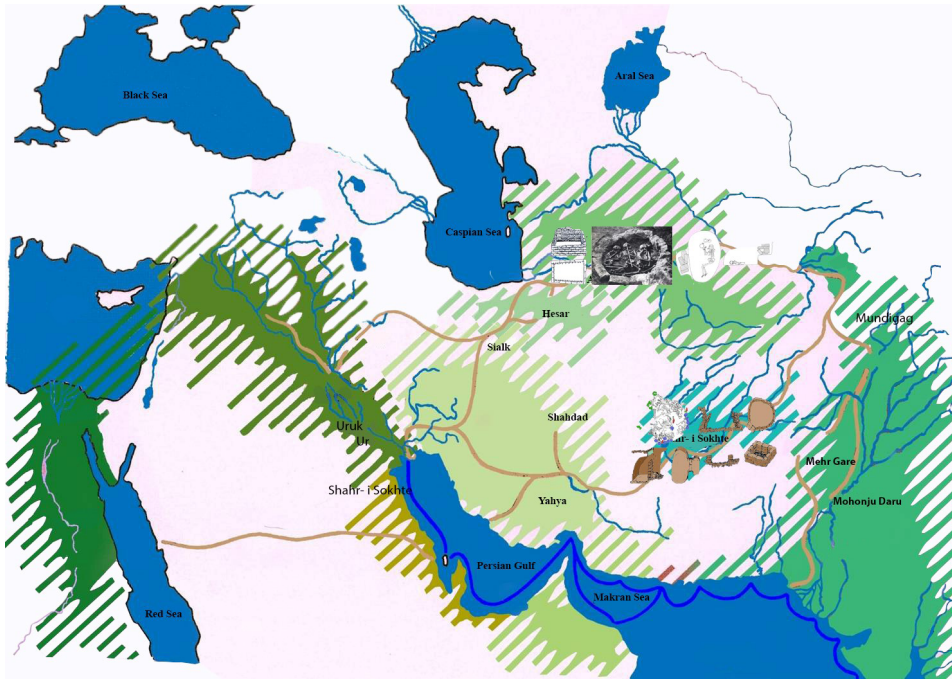


Fig. 41. The Grave Structures of Shahr-I Sokhta and Area 1 (Sajjadi, 2015: Fig. 61)



Fig. 42. Shahr-i Sokhta: Game Board, Beads and Dice (Sajjadi, 2015: Fig. 61)

but there are also signs of sharing some intellectual and religious beliefs. One of these examples is the presence of game boards in both societies. The presence of such entertainment reveals a kind of well-being and comfort in those societies. One example is a wooden board with dice and beads found in grave No.731 of Shahr-i Sokhta.

Another example, similar to Shahr-i

Sokhta's game board was found among the recycled objects of Jiroft, in the form of a table made of chlorite but without beads. An object similar to these game boards, made of bones and ivory, was found in the cemetery of Gnuor Tepe.

Such games and other types of intellectual entertainment have traditionally been prevalent in the ancient times. Game boards and relative beads and dice,

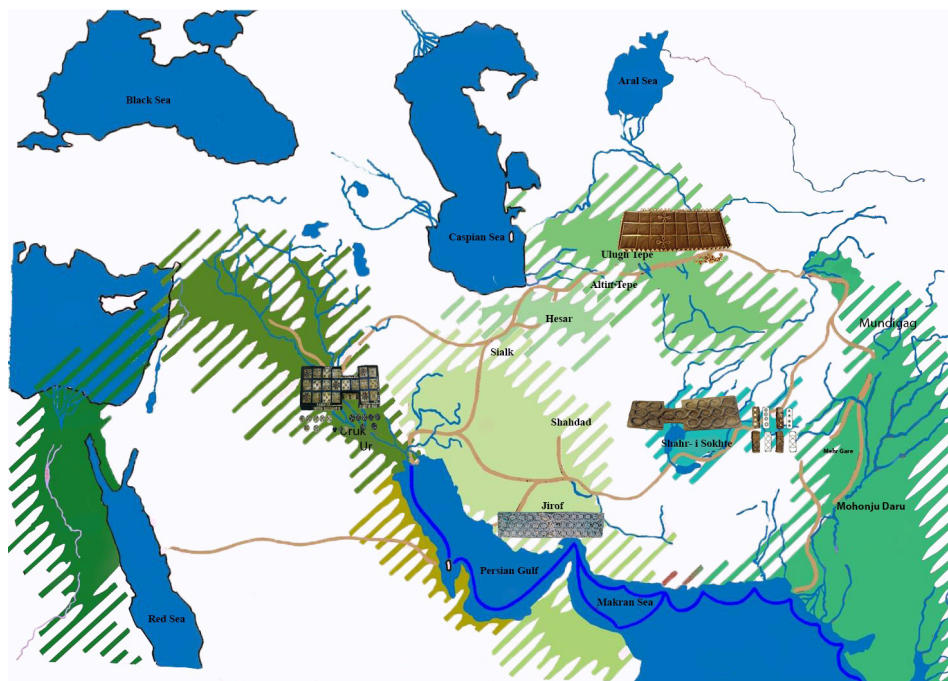


Fig. 43. Distribution of Various Type of Game Boards In Middle East (Sajjadi, 2015: Fig. 61)

beside mentioned samples are found in Mehgarreh, Enkomi in Cyprus (1580 BC), Harapa and Mohenjodaro. A “chess” wooden box and its beads belonging to the Egyptian architect *Kha* and his wife

was found in Deyr al Madineh of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty, (15th and 16th Centuries BC), and the game boxes of Ak Hur and Sent game in Egypt (Seyed Sajjadi, 2010b).

Bibliography

- AA. VV. (1980). *Le Grandi Avventure dell' Archeologia. I misteri delle civiltà scomparse*. Armando Curcio Editore
- AA. VV. (2001). *Antica Persia. I tesori del Museo Nazionale di Tehran e la ricerca italiana in Iran*. Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 29/5-22/7/2001. De Luca editori, Roma, XXVII-XXIX.
- Casal. J.M. (1961). *Fouilles de Moundigak* (Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan, 17), 2 Vols. Paris
- De Cardi, B. (1970). “Excavations at Bampur, A Third Millennium Settlement in Persian Baluchistan, 1966”, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. 50. New York, Part 2.
- Dyson, H.R. Jr. (1972). “The Burned Building of Tepe Hissare IIIB”, *Bastan Chenasi va Honnar Iran*. Nos. 9-10. Tehran. Pp. 57-83.
- Fairservis, Walter. (1961). *Archaeological studies in*

the Seistan Basin of southwestern Afghanistan and eastern Iran. Vol. 48. New York.

Framukin, G. (1970). *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia*. Brill.

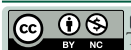
Kircho, L.B.; Korbokova G. F & Masson, V.M. (2008). “The Technical and Technological Potential of the Eneolithic population of Altyn-depe as the bases of the Rise of an Early urban civilization”, *European House* St. Petersburg.

Khlopin. I.N. (1981). “The Early Bronze Age Cemetery of Parkhai II: The first two seasons of Excavations 1977-78”, In L. Kohl (ed.), *The Bronze Age of Civilization of Central Asia*, Armonk, New York. Pp. 3-34.

Kohl, Ph.l. (1984). *Central Asia. Palaeolithic Beginning to Early Iron Age*. Synthèse No. 14 Paris: Édition Recherche sur les Civilizations.

MehrAfarin, R. (2022). Stone Scale/Weights of Bronze Age from Sistan, Iran. *Persica Antiqua*,

- 2(2), 27-36. doi:10.22034/pa.2021.316978.1005
- Moradi, Hossein; Sarhaddi-Dadian, Hossein; Shuhami Nik Abdul Rahman, Nik Hassan. (2014). "Development and fall of the Bampur Valley, Based on the New Archaeological evidences in Prehistoric period", *Iranian Studies, Journal of the International Society for Iranian Studies*, Volume: 47, Issue: 2, pp. 263-287
- Piperno, M., and S. Salvatori. (2007). *The Shahr-i Sokhta Graveyard (Sistan-Iran)*, Rome. ISIAO.
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2005). *Bampur Tepe. The First Season of Excavations at Bampur Tepe*. Tehran. Center for Archaeological Center& Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2010a). *Indian Sub-Continent Civilization*. Tehran. Samt (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2010b). "A Mental Game from Shahr-i Sokhta", *Bastanpazhuhi*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2015). "Exter-Regional Trade of Shahr-i Sokhta", In Morteza Hesari (ed.), *Mafakher-e Miras-e Farhangi-ye Iran, Festschrift of Sadegh Malek Shahmirzadi*, Tehran, Rieht, 59-95 (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2017). *Ancient Baluchistan*. Tehran. Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts & Tourism Organization of Sistan & Baluchistan (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2019). "Commercial/Cultural Relations with Neighboring Areas and Transboundary Territories", In S.M.S. Sajjadi (ed.), *Shahr-I Sokhta. Archaeology & Art of the Delta of Hirmand River* (Two Vols.), Tehran, Farhangestan Honar (in Persian).
- Sajjadi, S.M.S. (2022). "The Pottery of Shahr- Sokhta" In S. Alibeigi; M. R. Miri & H. Pittman (eds.), *Sepehr Majd*, Tehran. The Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia (in Persian).
- Seyed Sajjadi, S. M., & Moradi, H. (2022). The Preliminary Report on Excavations at Eastern Residential Area of Shahr-i Sokhta: Rooms 27 and 28. *Persica Antiqua*, 2(3), 101-109. doi: 10.22034/pa.2022.347323.1015
- Sarianidi, V.I., (1983). "The Pottery of Shahr-i Sokhta I and its Southern Turkmenian Connections", In M. Tosi (ed.), *Prehistoric Sistan 1, Is-MEO Rep Mem XIX* (1). IsMEO, Rome, 183-198.
- Sarianidi, V.I. (1998). *Margiana and Protozoroastrism*. Kapon Editions.



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Tissaphernes Archaeological Research Group, Tehran, Iran. [Open Access](#).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The ethical policy of Ancient Iranian Studies is based on the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines and complies with International Committee of Ancient Iranian Studies Editorial Board codes of conduct. Readers, authors, reviewers and editors should follow these ethical policies once working with Ancient Iranian Studies. The ethical policy of Ancient Iranian Studies is liable to determine which of the typical research papers or articles submitted to the journal should be published in the concerned issue. For information on this matter in publishing and ethical guidelines please visit www.publicationethics.org.