

Archaic States

Edited by Gary A. Feinman and Joyce Marcus



6

Uruk States in Southwestern Iran

HENRY T. WRIGHT

Anthropology developed within the institutions of state politics. The perceptions and theoretical perspectives of anthropologists have been forged by the contradictory demands of our research disciplines and of the peoples, living and dead, whom we have come to represent. It is therefore not surprising that we want to know as much as possible about the kinds of entities that give contexts for our work, including how states came to be and how they came to differ from the diversity of other kinds of politics. Such interests lead to a focus on the earliest states. There is, however, much disagreement among scholars about the characterization of early states. Are they theater politics, mere symbolic games in the minds of self-appointed princes? Or are they apparatuses that controlled the material resources and lives of their participants? Such disagreements benefit from consideration of the evidence of past states.

Primary states, those that arose from interaction between prestate societies (Wright 1977), rarely had the capacity to record discursive accounts of their genesis and operation. The task of understanding how such politics worked is largely the responsibility of archaeologists, who must proceed by evaluating the consequences of different ideas about the past with material evidence, criticizing the assumptions of proposals that fail, generating new ideas, and evaluating these yet again. The process is tedious, but it has enabled archaeologists to go beyond idealist and racist conceptions of cultural formation, beyond elementary material/energetic theories of change, to the

complex systemic and existential conceptions that are the focus of research today.

The application of such approaches during the past few decades in the study of the world by the small cadre of anthropological archaeologists has generated far more insight into operation than genesis. The reasons for this disparity are various. On the one hand, the periods in which many states originated were times of conflict, characterized by the movement of communities and by general human misery. The relevant archaeological layers are often ephemeral, badly eroded, or deeply buried by the debris of later, more prosperous periods; the modest discarded material remains have attracted less interest than they merit. On the other hand, even if we could obtain the archaeological record needed, we would still lack the theoretical structures essential for talking about the complex social, symbolic, and material transformations that seem to have been important in the development of states. It may be useful to consider the better-known operation of egalitarian primary states, where in some cases we do have rich archaeological records of material remains and even documentary records of individual actions, beliefs, or ideological claims. In this essay, I take a systematic perspective to discuss the operation of one of the regional states of the mid-fourth millennium BC in Southwestern Asia.

Scholars' assessments of mid-fourth-millennium politics are evolving rapidly. Four decades ago, when I first read about this period, it was viewed as a time of urban growth. Each developing town was centered on its temple, and we priests and dependent craftsmen were among the few specialists in a largely egalitarian world of farmers. The most developed governmental institutions were thought to be assemblies of prominent citizens (cf. Frankfort 1952–78). Rulers, dynasties, and state administration were thought not to have arisen until the middle of the third millennium BC. This assessment is based upon a concordance of three classes of evidence, each of which is central to the question.

First, the earliest known written records of rulers and dynasties were of the mid-third millennium BC. However, such political statements are only comparable with writing systems able to represent language. Mesopotamian writing prior to this time appears to have been graphic systems for representing numbers and objects, not language; it could have conveyed only indirect economic information about politics.

Second, the earliest architectural evidence of palatial residences separate from temples also dates to the mid-third millennium. This seemingly late appearance, however, results from the erosion at many southern Mesopotamian town sites that has exposed third-millennium layers. Early in the nineteenth century excavators were able to expose a number of mid-third-millennium towns and to identify temples and palaces. Since temples tend

to be rebuilt in the same location, archaeologists could reveal progressively earlier temples. Palatial residences, in contrast, were built in new locations. It is only recently that extensive exposures of fourth-millennium towns have documented such buildings.

Third, elaborate burials of political figures—marked by weapons, carts, and sacrificed animals or people—are attested from this same period. In fact, for whatever reason, few burial areas of the preceding periods have been excavated; the absence of a particular funerary procedure is meaningless given the general absence of funerary evidence.

Today, politics of the mid-third millennium are generally viewed as second- or third-generation states, the products of several successive phases of state development and collapse. Few who know the evidence of settlement scale and structure, economic activity, administrative activity, and iconography think that the cultural entities of the mid- to late-fourth millennium had theocratic political organization or egalitarian ideologies. Before turning to the current evidence for state organization in one part of the fourth-millennium world, however, some methodological remarks are appropriate.

If we are to evaluate processes in larger cultural entities and over long spans of time, archaeologists have to monitor individual decision making and action. Critics may argue that this is unattainable or at least impractical. It is sometimes said—I myself have said it (Wright 1980)—that archaeological records and documentary records are incommensurate, that archaeological garbage samples represent aggregate community action over long periods of time, and that only written texts represent the statements of specific actors about perceptions and decisions over short periods of time. I have come to believe that such statements result from archaeologists' failure to use both their imaginations and adequate archaeological methods, specifically excavation controls and dating approaches. If we take advantage of existing means of time control—microstratigraphy, microseriation, dendrochronology, and so on—and devise new ones using untapped biorhythms in shells, tusks, teeth, or unutilized isotopes, we can deal in short periods of time. Once lenses of garbage can be precisely recovered and dated, then we are at liberty to use them to evaluate propositions about actions and decisions at the level of individuals. This is what I try to exemplify in the following presentation.

My focus is on what I (and the colleagues with whom I was privileged to work in southwestern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s) termed the "Middle Uruk" and "Late Uruk" periods. This continuous period of cultural development dates between about 3800 and 3150 BC. My spatial focus is the Susiana Plain, or the Plain of Shush, and the regions dominated by the ancient town of Shushun (Vallat 1993), which English speakers know as Susa during this time (fig. 6.1). The politics that existed on the Susiana Plain are identified as states, albeit of an elemental form, because there is evidence of

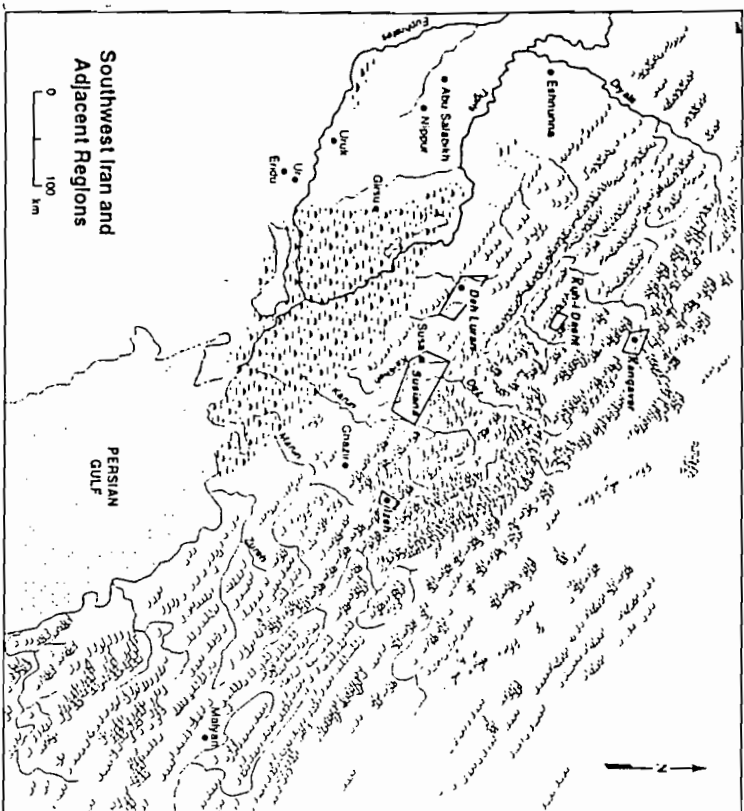


Figure 6.1. A portion of Mesopotamia.

the operation of control hierarchies with contrastive specialization in the control process—specifically, specialization between aggregation of goods, information summary, information transport, information checking, adjudication, and probably policy making. Such contrastive specialization allows the maintenance of hierarchies with four or more levels of control and spans of control able to integrate hundreds of communities and tens of thousands of people (Wright and Johnson 1975: 270–72).

I first discuss the real and cognized environments, followed by aspects of cultural structure and process on the rural Susiana Plain. I then discuss parallel aspects of the towns that dominated the plain. Finally, I deal with aspects of structure and process in the marginal regions of southwestern Iran. That our evidence relevant to these issues is episodic rather than comprehensive, and that our conclusions are limited, is a result of the cessation of research in this troubled region. We can only hope for a better future.

ENVIRONMENT AND COSMOGRAPHY IN THE FOURTH MILLENNIUM

The enduring geographical structure of what is today southwestern Iran (Adams 1962) is dictated by the uplifted folds and thrusts of the Zagros Mountains arcing around the northern and western edge of the lowlands. The foothills of these ranges are chaotic karstic areas interspersed with alluvial fans laid down by the Zagros streams (Oberlander 1965). Three rivers converging on the center of the region—the Karun from the east, Dez from the north, and Karkheh from the northwest—bring the waters of much of the central Zagros to a limited central area, where they have formed the Susiana Plain (fig. 6.2). Their fans coalesce and join with the vast Mesopotamian plain to the southwest. These geological structures are perhaps the only remaining elements of this region that would seem relatively familiar to peoples of the fourth millennium before our era. Much else has changed. In lowland Southwest Asia, the time span from at least 5500 until 3200 BC seems to have been wetter than the present (Larsen 1983; Rosen 1989), which would have had an impact on the natural vegetation and the possibilities for farming. The one published lake core from southwestern Iran, from Lake Mirabad at 950 m above sea level, 60 km north of Susa, does indeed show increased oak relative to grasses in the pollen rain, suggesting that forests flourished in the mountains at the expense of grassy pastures (van Zeist and Borrenna 1977). We expect that mountain goat, red deer, bear, leopard, and other animals also flourished. In the lower elevations, the original diverse cover of shrubs and leguminous herbs had long since been replaced by a limited suite of grasses able to survive constant grazing (Heldhak 1969), but these grasslands would have flourished well to the south of the Susa area, their southern limit today. Though in direct competition with domestic stock, wild gazelles, sheep, pigs, and onagers were still common enough to be regularly hunted during the Uruk period (Hole, Flannery, and Nacey 1969; Redding 1981).

In their representations on ceramics and on seals, however, pre-Uruk and Uruk peoples chose to focus on certain natural features, providing some indication of the assumptions they made about their world. The ordinary stamp seals of the pre-Uruk period (Amiet 1972: pls. 39–54) emphasized the wild goat or sheep, and only infrequently gazelle, deer, onager, pig, or other wild animals of the hills and plains. These animals usually occur singly. Cormorants and other wild fowl appear as minor elements. Those stamp and cylinder seals of the Middle and Late Uruk periods with representations of animals show changes in emphasis and structure. Domestic sheep and cow, and wild lion, pig, deer, and fish, are the most frequent recognizable

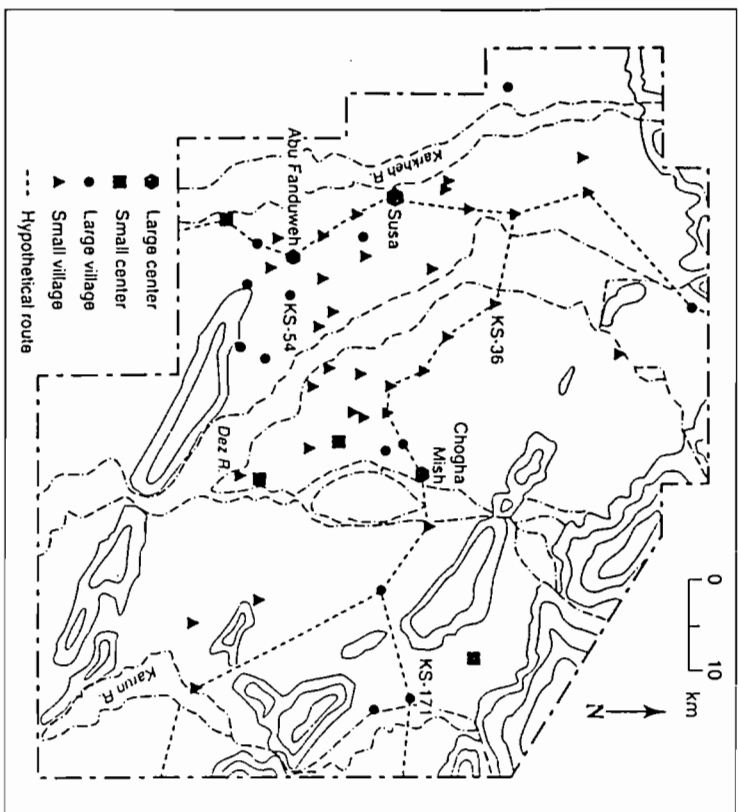


Figure 6.2. Mid-fourth-millennium southwest Iran (adapted from Johnson 1973; fig. 26).

vertebrates on the seals; the representations occur in banks and rows (Amiet 1972: pls. 56–77). Nature was shown as more domesticated and ordered, and this order could be represented repeatedly by rolling the cylinder seals (Le Brun 1985). The more elaborate stamp seals of pre-Uruk elite figures have either a central anthropomorphic figure holding opposed animals or a symmetrical quadripartite cosmic figure (Amiet 1972: pls. 48–50; Wright 1994). In contrast, the more elaborate Middle and Late Uruk cylinder seals had representations of human activity, perhaps thematically related to the activities of the seal bearer (Brandes 1979). Sometimes several figures were shown in reciprocal relations; sometimes one figure was dominant over the others (Amiet 1972: pls. 78–90). The people who commissioned these more elaborate seals seem to have chosen images of reciprocity or overt dominance, in contrast to the centrality and symmetry preferred by their predecessors. These representations indicate that actors in mid-fourth-

millennium Susiana cultural systems made decisions in a world ordered in space and time, with expectations of reciprocity from others, whether in nonhierarchical or hierarchical relations.

PRODUCTION AND CONTROL IN THE SUSIANA COUNTRYSIDE

During the Middle Uruk period, the most prosperous time during the fourth millennium BC, about 25,000 people lived in the settlements on the Susiana Plain (Schacht 1980). Scattered across the agriculturally more productive 1,400 km² of the plain were almost 60 communities, represented today by *tappels*, mounds of mud-brick debris and garbage. Many of these settlements were previously occupied in the poorly known Early Uruk period, and Middle Uruk ceramics show a development from local Early Uruk types (Wright 1985). Sites on the plain developed evidence of a four-level settlement hierarchy by Middle Uruk times. On grounds of surface area, Johnson categorized 46 of these sites as “small villages” (covering up to 1.5 ha) and “large villages” (covering from 1.5 to 3.0 ha), contrasting with a few larger settlements, discussed below (Johnson 1973: 101–43, fig. 10). Excavations have been conducted at two of the small Middle to Late Uruk communities, one a small village and the other a large village. Though both have evidence of grain cultivation and the exploitation of sheep, goats, and cows—patterns of production developed over the preceding two millennia in the region (Hole, Flannery, and Neely 1969)—the two communities were organized in very different ways.

The small village site of Tepe Sharafabad (KS-36) is located near the northern edge of the Susiana Plain, on the east side of the alluvial fan of the Dez River (see fig. 6.2). It was situated on a traditional route between the eastern and western portions of the plain, and not far from paths that cross the foothills in the direction of the higher pastures used by nomads since early Holocene times. During the Middle Uruk period, the occupied area covered about half a hectare, and Tepe Sharafabad is estimated to have had a population of about 100 inhabitants. Fragmentary architecture shows that people lived in modest, unplanned mud-brick houses, but the occurrence of the clay cones used to decorate special buildings in this period indicates that there also was some kind of elaborate building in the settlement. The domestic remains included few special goods, such as stone vessels, and the beads and amulets are of such modest materials as limestone, ceramic, and carnelian. These few items of social display indicate that rural elite residing in this small settlement had a lifestyle little different than that of other inhabitants.

Most of our evidence of Middle Uruk village life comes from a large pit filled with seasonally stratified garbage (Wright, Miller, and Redding 1980; Wright, Redding, and Pollock 1989). Miller's analysis of the plant remains from this pit indicates that the people of Sharafabad cultivated fields of barley, wheat, and lentils and had access to irrigated flax. However, we cannot estimate proportions grown or eaten, since barley may enter the record in the form of carbonized seeds through the burning of animal dung as well as the accidental burning of food, whereas wheat is evidenced primarily by the burned by-products of grain winnowing and cleaning. There is no evidence of other plant foods such as orchard crops and wild foods. Redding's analysis of the animal bones has shown that the inhabitants culled local herds of sheep and goats, primarily the former, killing lambs and kids in late summer and older female animals in late winter. In the first agriculturally successful year represented by the pit, animals of all types and ages were culled, following a strategy that optimized the reproductive capacity of the herd. In the following year of agricultural crisis, the number of sheep and goat killed dropped to 26 percent of its former level, and there was a focus on the killing of younger animals, even of females that would normally be saved for future breeding stock. The villagers also butchered an occasional cow or pig, hunted waterfowl, and fished.

Sharafabad, however, did not have a self-contained village economy. Many of the things people used came from outside, and some of their activities were coordinated by outside authorities. Most of their durable goods—pots, chert cores, grinding stones, and so on—probably came from elsewhere. There is evidence that most jars and bowls came from one or the other of the larger towns (Johnson 1973: 113–29; Wright and Johnson 1975: 279–82), perhaps depending on market opportunity. The other goods could have come from specialists elsewhere or been obtained by the villagers themselves. For the most part, vessels were discarded at similar rates, regardless of season or of whether or not the year was prosperous. A cylinder sealing of nonlocal clay on a jar rim shows that at least some of the pots came with goods sealed in them (James Blackman, personal communication 1980). Some sealings on bales and baskets, particularly several with impressions of a cylinder seal with a beer-drinking or "symposium" scene, may represent the closure of goods by officials at another place and their subsequent dispatch to Sharafabad. Other seals—stamp seals with iconically similar representations of a candid and a person, stamped on both bale seals and on the seals of storage room door locks—are those of an official or several officials who either were residents or visited the site to authorize closure of its storerooms. Regardless of whether the year was agriculturally good or bad, the same number of bales and jars seemed to have been opened at Sharafabad.

It is notable that storehouse doors were opened on the site, most often in winter or early summer. While few discarded door sealings were found in debris of the first prosperous year, many were found in debris of the second year, that of agricultural crisis, when we might expect institutional storehouses to have been opened as domestic food supplies ran out. Conversely, in the good year, there is more evidence of involvement by Sharafabad people in institutional labor. The crude bevel-rim bowls, probably made for the issuing of institutional rations or meals (Johnson 1973: 129–39; Le Brun 1980; Nissen 1970: 137), were recycled in domestic tasks and discarded at least twice as frequently in the prosperous first year as during the second year, indicating either that local people participated in more institutional labor or that more outside laborers came in when times were good. Also, what are believed to be fragments of unfinished clay envelopes—"pherical bullae" wrapped around clay tokens indicating quantities of items (Amiet 1972; Schmandt-Besserat 1992) and probably recording goods leaving the site—were discarded twice as frequently during the prosperous first year, suggesting double the rate of transport from the site that year. Sharafabad people seem to have profited from their labor in the good year, discarding four times as many sheep and goat bones as well as more bones of pig, cow, and wild animals. During the bad year they lived less well but received some supplementary help from institutional storehouses in jars and bales, as noted above.

The large village site of KS-54, the second rural site for which we have a range of information, covered up to 2.5 ha during the Middle and Late Uruk periods and perhaps had as many as 500 inhabitants. It is located in a dense settlement concentration on the long-occupied, but more arid, southern edge of the Susiana Plain, west of the Dez River. Unfortunately, two-thirds of the site was leveled before investigation could take place. Our evidence comes from a variety of contexts, mostly of the Late Uruk period, from a series of small excavations along bulldozer-cut faces transecting the settlement (Johnson 1976). These soundings revealed social differences in architecture, including the remains of a large domestic building with massive mud-brick walls in the center of the settlement and more modest structures elsewhere. Differences in possessions discarded around these two types of architecture indicate marked social differences. Stone vessels, decorative plaques, and beads of gold and lapis lazuli were associated with the elaborate building, but no such embellishments were found around modest buildings.

Subsistence patterns at KS-54 were broadly similar to that at earlier Sharafabad. Naomi Miller (personal communication 1974) examined the plant remains from samples taken along this section at the time of initial survey and found carbonized grains of domestic barley, glumes of wheat, and

lentils. Detailed quantitative study of the fauna from Johnson's excavation by Karen Mudar (1988) shows that sheep and goat provided most of the meat consumed, but there was more use of domestic cow and pig than at Sharafabad. Few wild resources were consumed at KS-54. Comparison of equivalent types of depositional contexts around an elaborate higher-status dwelling and a modest lower-status dwelling shows more discarded remains of birds and fish and meatier cuts of mutton, goat, and beef around the higher-status buildings. The overall density of bone, however, was lower in the higher-status building, perhaps a result of maintenance by servants.

KS-54 was no more a self-contained village than Sharafabad, but the available evidence shows that its relations with the broader area were quite different. Although we do not have information from a deep stratified pit like that at Sharafabad, we can nonetheless argue for some broad differences between the two sites. First, most of the durable goods at KS-54 probably came from other settlements. There is little evidence of pottery production, and the site was much farther from sources of chert and grinding slabs than Sharafabad. Detailed study of the stylistic attributes of the pottery indicates that it came from one production center, rather than several (Wright and Johnson 1985:28). Second, even though ashy deposits that might preserve sealings, counters, and envelope fragments were carefully searched, no such administrative items were found. This could be a result of limited samples, but it suggests that goods were rarely shipped into KS-54 in sealed bales and bottles and were rarely shipped out to institutional warehouses elsewhere. It seems likely that the surpluses extracted from the farmers of KS-54 were consumed locally, with the more desirable resources being consumed by local elite families.

In sum, country people of the Susiana Plain derived most of their durable consumer goods from other types of settlements, while producing foods for themselves and other settlements. We have evidence that at least one small rural settlement from the end of the Middle Uruk period (KS-36, Tepe Sharafabad) gave up some of its foodstuffs, but it received goods from institutional storerooms both elsewhere and on site. Another rural settlement from the beginning of the Late Uruk period (KS-54) produced no evidence of the shipping out of its products; many of its producers may have been in the service of a resident local elite. With a sample of only two settlements, we cannot say whether there was a shift through time toward greater exploitation of rural workers, but we can certainly propose marked differences in institutional relations from settlement to settlement. Let us now turn to the larger settlements on which these varying relationships seem to have been centered.

CONTROL AND CONSUMPTION IN THE SUSIANA TOWNS

Johnson (1973:73, fig. 10) classified four of the larger settlements on the Susiana Plain as small centers from 4 ha up to 8 ha. None of these sites has been excavated; we can only note that three of these interesting settlements are on the margins of the cluster of settlements and may have been involved in frontier activities.

The larger centers or towns (settlements larger than 8 ha) on the plain seem to have been organizationally similar in their spatial structure, the production activities pursued in them, and their span of control, as indicated by seals and sealings. All show a distinct separation between a smaller, upper town situated on the mounded remains of an earlier settlement and a larger, newly founded or refounded lower town. All have discarded sickle blades, indicating participation of townspeople in the harvest, when ripened crops must be brought in as quickly as possible. All have evidence of the production of pottery and stone tools. All have indications of the administrative technology that in Mesopotamia implies control of the storage of goods. However, the three known larger towns differ in their historical trajectories, in the maximum size they reached, and in the particulars of their economic and political organization.

Susa, on the west edge of the plain, was by far the largest; its 9-ha upper town was established during the Early Uruk period on the remains of the great ritual platform of the late fifth millennium after a brief abandonment. At the beginning of the Middle Uruk period, the lower town extended several hundred meters to the north and covered at least 25 ha. Evidence of larger buildings (Dyson 1966; Stève and Gasche 1973) and administrative activities comes from the upper town (as detailed below). However, evidence of a large pottery kiln is well reported from the lower town (Miro-schedji 1986), and there may have been larger buildings there as well (Stève and Gasche 1990). There is little evidence this lower town was occupied during the Late Uruk period.

Abu Fanduwah (KS-59), on the south edge of the plain, was much smaller. Its 4 ha upper town was established during the Early Uruk period on the remains of a platform of the late fifth millennium; its lower town extended to the north during Middle and Late Uruk times to cover an additional 6 ha or more. Excavation was limited prior to the cessation of fieldwork in 1978; the only evidence of administrative activity is a door sealing from the surface of the upper town. On the northern periphery of the lower town, however, a large series of small pottery kilns has been recorded (Johnson 1973:107-8).

Chogha Mish, on the northeast periphery of the plain, was intermediate in size. It was refounded late in the Middle Uruk period, when its upper town occupied the remains of a small late-fifth-millennium citadel of little more than a hectare, and its lower town spread south over the low ruins of the major regional center of the early fifth millennium. During Late Uruk times, when Chogha Mish seems to have been independent of Susa (Johnson 1973:142-47, 1987), the lower town grew to cover at least 17 ha. Larger buildings in the small upper town are not yet reported. However, there is evidence from the lower town, in the form of scaled spherical bullae and numerical tablets, that Late Uruk administration in the larger settlement utilized parts of the lower town. Also in the lower town, individual pottery kilns were found in the rooms or courts of modest domestic units (Delougaz and Kantor 1996).

Due to the limited nature of excavation on all three towns, we cannot be sure that large pottery firing areas like that at Abu Fanduwah did not exist on the edges of Susa or Chogha Mish, or that administrative areas similar to that at Chogha Mish did not exist in the lower towns of Susa or Abu Fanduwah. Taken at face value, however, the extant evidence indicates some variability in the spatial organization of activities at the three major towns. Recognizing that its history and great size may render it atypical, let us take a close look at the evidence of varying activities at Susa, where the information is somewhat more detailed.

Our best perspective on the daily lives of townspeople comes from Alain Le Brun's superb excavations of domestic structures on the Southern Acropolis of Susa. These "Acropole I" structures date primarily to the Late Uruk period, when the town seems to have diminished in size to encompass primarily the old upper town. The people consumed wheat and lentils but also had access to grapes and nuts such as almonds (Naomi Miller, personal communication 1996). They used chert blades, small rough bowls, medium-sized finer bowls, jars, and bottles, and large jars not very different from those found at contemporary villages. Layer 17B2 in the Acropole I sound-ing (Le Brun 1978) can be considered in detail (fig. 6.3).

Two discrete architectural units are present, connected by a door. One is rectangular. It is laid out in approximately 12 x 9 units of linear measure of 65 m and has three rooms, all with exterior access. The largest room, with a sunken oval fireplace at one end and a small platform at the other, was kept clean (see fig. 6.3). Locus 770). This unit also has a small room with a dense concentration of items (Locus 757). There are domestic artifacts such as a tall jar, a few small cups, bowls, and jars, grinding stones, and a spindle whorl. Administrative artifacts include two tokens, a stamp seal, a cylinder seal, and three numerical tablets. Items of social display, including a stone vessel, a metal pin, beads, and pendants, were made from materials available

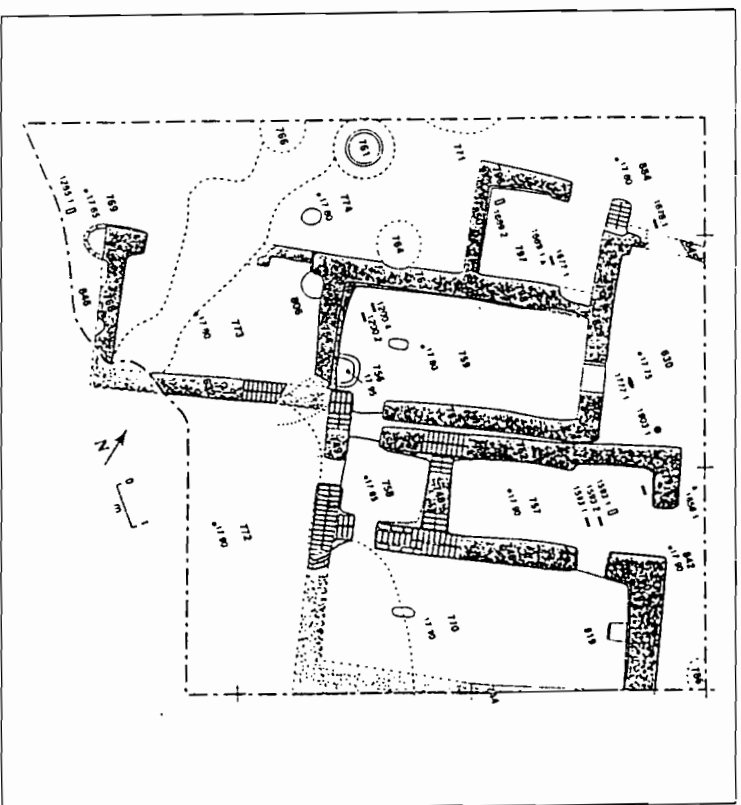


Figure 6.3. Susa, Acropole I, Layer 17B2 (adapted from Le Brun 1978).

in the region, such as alabaster, calcite, or bitumen. Just outside the door of this small room was a possible kitchen area (Locus 830) with a single spherical bulla and an oblong bulla with several impressions of a single cylinder seal, which could be used either for verification of other sealings or validation of a messenger.

The other unit is L-shaped and somewhat smaller. Its three rooms have exterior access but no access to each other. The largest room has a sunken oval fireplace and a raised fireplace, but only a few sherds and a toothed mandible of a sawfish on its floor (Locus 759). Another room with an oven and mortars may have been a kitchen (Locus 773). The L-shaped unit also has a small room with dense concentrations of discarded material on its floor (Locus 797). There are domestic artifacts such as a bottle and bottle sealing, many cups, bowls, and grinding stones, and a spindle whorl. Administrative artifacts such as a cylinder seal and a numerical tablet were recovered. There also are four alabaster and calcite maceheads of a type fixed onto a handle with straps, some finished and some unfinished, perhaps for social coercion

or display. Oblong pecking stones may have been used to manufacture these maceheads and other stone items.

The assemblages on the floors of these units are probably items not deemed worthy of systematic disposal or recycling when the buildings were leveled. Scattered items are difficult to interpret, but the concentrations in small rooms are stored items that either spoiled or were broken in place. The regular occurrence in both storerooms of bottles or tall jars and cups or small bowls probably indicates routine serving of liquids in each unit. The seals and numerical tablets probably indicate the general involvement of the occupants in record keeping. It is notable that both of the cylinder seals in these two units are small and share spiderlike motifs, but they were not used to impress any of the other items found. The numerical tablets in these units had impressions of large cylinders with files of animals, or with scenes in which human figures manipulate jars, or with both. The numbers recorded are small, ranging from 3 to 22, but we do not know what commodities were monitored and whether the tablets record past deposits, promised future transactions, or both (Le Brun and Vallat 1978). The concentration of macehead production debris in one unit and social display items in another indicates individual specializations just before rebuilding of the complex. But similar concentrations occur on floors of the succeeding Layer 17B1, albeit in different rooms, so these specializations were enduring and not merely a result of unique circumstances. The debris pattern suggests these special activities—presumably in support of social rituals—were performed only episodically by the inhabitants of this residential area.

From bullae found long ago at Susa (Amiet 1972), we know that during the Middle and Late Uruk periods summary documents reached Susa, were assessed by a higher authority, and then were stored or discarded there. However, we have very few well-excavated contexts that can be informative about the organization of the Middle Uruk control apparatus. Nevertheless, still-incomplete excavations on the Northern Acropolis, the "Acropole III" excavation, provide useful details of office life (Wright 1985). The building in question, that of Layer 2, seems to have faced north within a rectangular space between a vacant area (fig. 6-4, Locus 157) and the court of another building. One crossed a courtyard (Locus 163), entering the building through a vestibule on the left (Locus 160), and turned right into a large room (Loci 131/154) with only a simple surface hearth in the center (Locus 159). From this room one could enter a corridor (Locus 106) which gave access to several small rooms at the rear of the building, now largely eroded away. The single surviving nearly complete rear room (Locus 102) had very small hearths, one deep and one shallow. This building had been carefully cleaned prior to its final leveling; only a small stone vessel in a niche by the

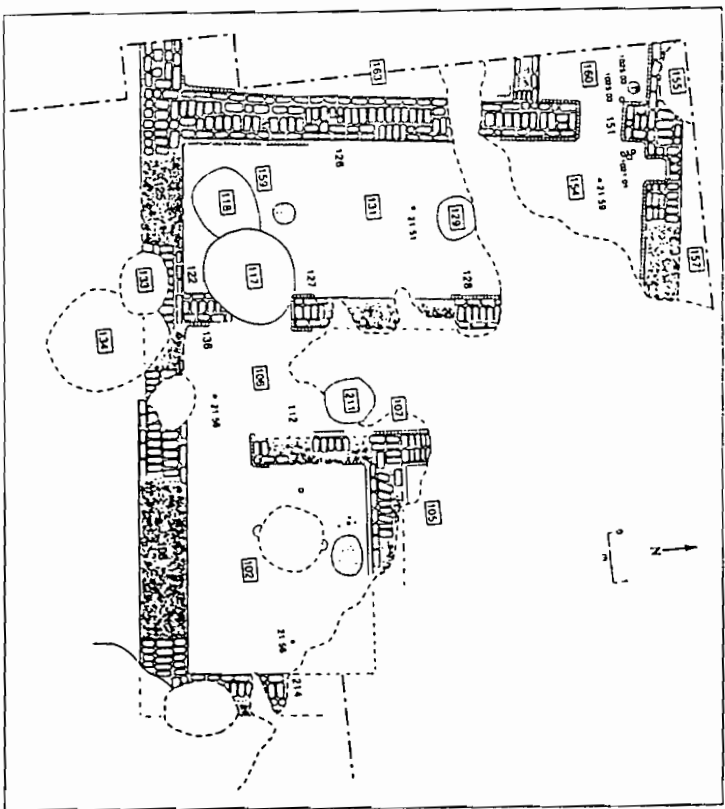


Figure 6-4. Susa Acropole III, Layer 2 (adapted from Wright 1985).

door (1021.01), a bevel-rim bowl sherd, and a cup sherd remained on its floors.

Excavation revealed a pit containing debris probably discarded by workers in the immediate predecessor of this building, which was very similar to the building described here. This pit contained many nearly complete bevel-rim bowls and some small jars, sheep/goat bones, charred debris, and various artifacts resulting from administrative activity. Among these were bale and basket sealings with the impressions of perhaps eight different seals, most frequently of two small cylinder seals, one representing a spider and one with rows of small figures, presumably removed from incoming packages. There also was a sealing from the opening of a storeroom. In contrast were items probably indicating outgoing summary information, both unfinished bulla coverings and tokens representing various quantities of items. Although we can presume no necessary relation between the opening of the

packages or storerooms and the preparation of the summaries—the packages might have been incidental to the central activities of what we might term an "office"—numerical records were prepared here. Whether these records were summaries of prior transactions, as argued for Sharafabad, or agreements for future transactions, as may have been case for the Late Uruk Southern Acropolis, their preparation indicates the recording of precise numerical information for future reference.

We learn almost as much about the organization of the Middle Uruk control apparatus from the way this public building was constructed and repaired as we do from the evidence of activities within it. It was laid out as a rectangle of 18 by 15 units (each measuring .65 m), similar to the larger unit in Acropolis I, 17B2. The use of similar units of measure indicates that nations had strict standards, as did other crafts such as potting and stone working, but this need not imply centralized control of these crafts. The walls of the Acropolis III, Layer 2 building were not laid precisely upon the footings of the earlier buildings in the area, so the footings settled irregularly into the softer sediments of former room fills. To remedy this, the mud-brick walls were cut down almost to floor level and relaid with a brick of slightly different size, suggesting that a different work crew was called in to deal with the problem. Finally, thick mud-plaster floors had to be put in place to cover additional irregularities. Thus, the building hierarchy was able to correct for the errors of imposed architectural design.

After some period of use, the building required minor replastering and reflooring. A pit was dug inside the building, blocking a key doorway (see fig. 6.4, Locus 117), and presumably used to make mud plaster. Later, slabs of old plaster were dumped into the pit. Then a set of complete bevel-rim bowls (in which rations or institutional meals of stew or bread could have been served, as noted above), a few small jars and their jar stoppers, and some sheep/goat bones—the durable remains of a meal for a number of people very similar to meals consumed by the building's normal occupants (as represented by the external pit)—were thrown into the internal pit. A large mass of evidently unneeded still-wet mud plaster was dumped in, followed by a load of miscellaneous stone and battered sherds. Finally, its purpose as a source of mud and as a receptacle for the debris of the repair operation finished, the pit was sealed beneath a new mud flooring. Thus, when the building needed repair, it was evacuated, a work crew subsidized by an institutional kitchen was called in, and the work was finished in a brief period of time. In sum, when maintenance was needed, a higher-level organization, whether the same organization that built the building or not, could see to its repair with dispatch. At least one modest urban organization was able to deal routinely both with its basic operations over time and with errors in the construction and operation of its material infrastructure.

We know only a few of the basic elements of the network of control at Middle and Late Uruk Susa and even less about the higher-order context of control. Only limited excavations have been attempted at buildings that could have been the residences or offices of controlling figures. The sealings and seals themselves, however, have important implications for higher-order control. If there was a disagreement between parties over a transaction, a sealed bulla could be broken open and its counters could be checked. This implies an adjudicating authority. Adjudication implies a system of precedents or regulations. Although human societies can handle adjudication and policy formation in diffuse and ad hoc ways, there are indications of a higher-order structure of offices at Susa and Chogha Mish, offices that were probably concerned with issues of policy and ultimate control.

Different levels of control should have different seal iconographies. As noted above, the majority of cylinder sealings portray activities. Many are directly related to production—herding, the filling of storehouses, or craft activities—whereas others seem to portray daily life, such as drinking parties. These latter occur on both commodity sealings and information-bearing bullae (Amiet 1972; Charvat 1988). They are probably the seals of low-level overseers. Some seals portray scribes taking records of activities (Pittman 1993); where the item being sealed can be determined, these occur on information-bearing bullae and tablets (Amiet 1972: pls. 79–81). The seals showing scribes probably pertained to activities concerned with the receipt of information. A few sealings portray distinctively dressed figures holding audiences, involved in conflict, or performing rituals (Amiet 1972: pls. 18, 85, 87; Schmandt-Besserat 1993), but exactly what such seals were used on is unclear. They may represent the highest offices with ultimate control of Susiana political policy, ritual, and warfare.

SETTLEMENTS IN THE HINTERLANDS OF SOUTHWESTERN IRAN

In the six or more centuries during which Susa reached a peak of prosperity, declined as Chogha Mish grew to become a competing center, and finally was abandoned, the peoples of the marginal valleys developed varying relations with larger centers. The Deh Luran Plain is centered 110 km, or three to four days' travel time, to the northwest of Susa in the foothills of the Pushk-i Kuh, the front range of the central Zagros (see fig. 6.1). The plain is a relatively large foothill valley, covering about 940 km², watered by the perennial Mehmeh and Dairirij (or Ab Danan) Rivers. Most of its rolling surface is difficult to irrigate, though well suited to grazing and dry farming. Deh Luranis had direct access to oak forests on the flanks of Kabir Kuh to the north, bitumen seeps, and gravel beds rich in cherts and other

useful stones. There was easy access not only to the Susiana Plain, but to the Mesopotamian plain to the southwest: it is not surprising that the small communities of the Deh Luran area were often dominated by other areas. We know of fourth millennium events on this plain through detailed archaeological survey (Neely and Wright 1994) and through excavations at the small center of Farukhabad (Wright 1981).

The Deh Luran Plain was resettled during the Early Uruk period after several centuries of near abandonment. In Middle Uruk times there were about 770 people on the plain, only a third of the population maximum reached a millennium earlier. Settlement hierarchy had only two tiers—the little center at Farukhabad and four or five small villages (Neely and Wright 1994:208, table VI.16). Small excavations in the center revealed fragments of modest mud-brick houses, ovens, and the familiar technology of blades, sickles, grinding stones, bowls, and jars. The striking feature of this assemblage is that the pottery is not a development of the local Susiana traditions but is in the "chaff-faced" tradition that became established during the late fifth millennium in the mountain and foothill valleys of the Zagros, anti-Taurus, and Amanus Mountains.

Our small soundings did not reveal evidence of elaborate Middle Uruk buildings, but the presence of mother-of-pearl furniture inlay (Wright 1981:156, fig. 75j; pl. 19a) hints at such buildings elsewhere. The occurrence of a sealed spherical bulla made of clay probably from elsewhere on the Deh Luran Plain (James Blackman, personal communication 1980) indicates the receipt of messages by administrators in the little center (Wright 1981:156, fig. 75d, pl. 16e). About a quarter of the animals consumed around modest housing in this center were hunted gazelles and onagers. Sheep and, to a lesser degree, goats provided the bulk of the meat in the Deh Luran diet; cows were rare and pigs were absent. About half the sheep and goats, probably the males, were butchered between the ages of one and three, a prudent strategy for herders interested in the reproduction of their flocks.

The preponderance of barley in the preserved Middle Uruk plant remains, a reversal of the fifth millennium pattern, may indicate increasing salinization (Helbak 1969) but may equally result from an increased focus on herding and increased use of dung as fuel (Miller 1984). There also is much evidence of spinning and weaving technology, suggesting that cloth production, presumably from animal fiber, was a local industry. Other industries are the preparation of bitumen and large coarse-grained chert blade cores, apparently for export (Wright 1981:266–70, 275–77). Imported durable goods include copper, fine-grained cherts, and marine shell for ornaments (Wright 1981:272–75). In sum, Middle Uruk Deh Luran had a

small, prosperous population involved in craft production and export of animal products, bitumen, and chipped stone. From the broader Uruk world, they received modest supplies of exotic commodities.

During Late Uruk times, the organization of the Deh Luran Plain changed, even though the basic two-tier settlement hierarchy was maintained. There were about 400 people, most in the center at Farukhabad, the rest scattered among two or three small hamlets. The distribution of settlements was similar to that during Middle Uruk times, but there seem to have been fewer people—less than a tenth the number that would occupy the plain at the beginning of the Early Dynastic period, three centuries later (Neely and Wright 1994:208, table VI.16).

Our excavations in the center revealed an area with fragments of modest mud-brick houses (fig. 6.5a) with the usual blades, sickles, grinding stones, bowls, and jars. A notable feature of this assemblage is that the local chaff-faced wares were used only for some of the cooking jars; the serving and storage vessels were made with the sand-tempered, often wheel-thrown, Uruk Wares typical of the larger centers of Mesopotamia, such as Nippur, Uruk, and Susa. In the trash around these modest residences, the density of the bones of hunted animals drops off and that of domestic animals increases in comparison to that of Middle Uruk times (Redding 1981:table 69). Goats appear to predominate over sheep. One-third of the kids and lambs were killed before reaching the age of one year, a less-than-optimal butchering pattern that may be a result of restricted access to summer pasturage (Redding, personal communication 1996). As during the Middle Uruk, barley predominates in the seed samples. There is evidence of pottery firing and spinning and weaving around these simple structures, and a lightly baked scaling, probably from a bale of skins, was discarded near them (Wright 1981:156, pl. 16a).

Our excavations also documented an area of nonresidential activities and elaborate buildings with massive walls of miniature mud bricks (fig. 6.5b), circular platforms (fig. 6.5c), and ceramic drains. There are high proportions of bevel-rim bowls around all of these features, and a high proportion of cups and spouted bottles around the platforms. A concentration of bitumen and chert-processing debris was found around these buildings. Whether these were residences or institutional buildings, the occupants apparently were involved in mass labor and in the preparation of items for export. The discard of waste products relative to the actual local use of these materials increases greatly, indicating increased production for export. In spite of a continued emphasis on herding, evidence of spinning and weaving decreases, suggesting that animals on the hoof or unprocessed fibers, rather than cloth, were exported (Wright 1981:266–72). Notwithstanding the evidence of

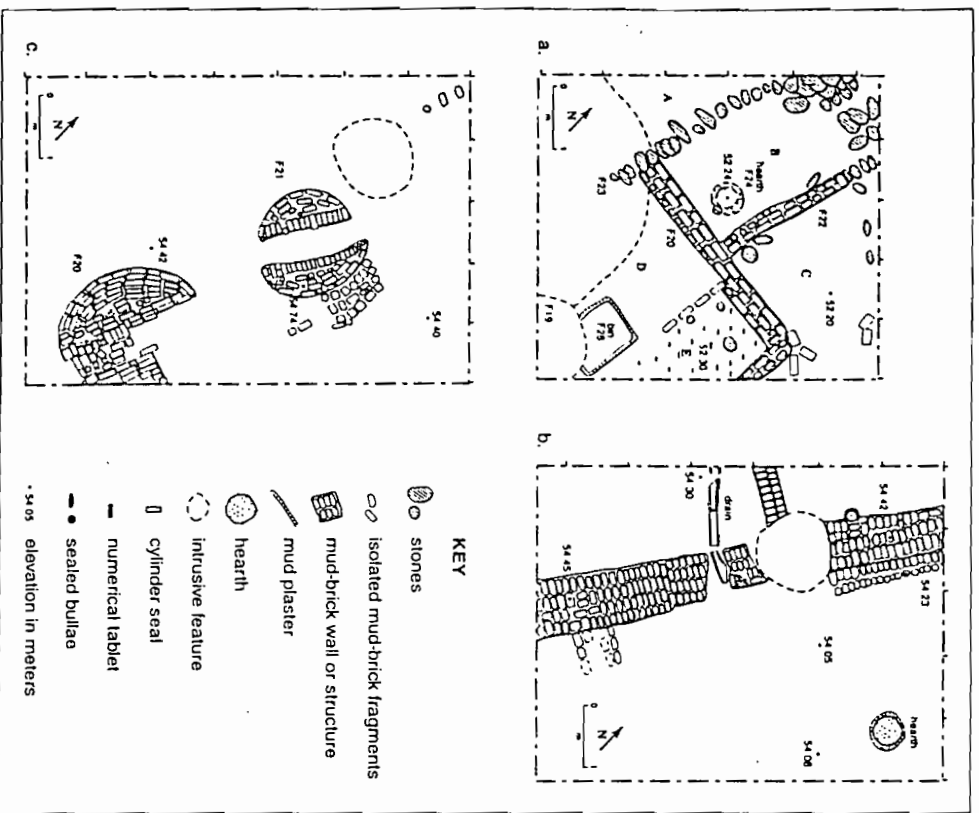


Figure 6.5. Late Uruk features at Farkhabad (adapted from Wright, *ed.* 1981): a. Excavation A, Layer 21; b. Excavation B, Layer 29; c. Excavation B, Layer 30.

increased production for export, import of durable goods such as fine-grained cherts, copper, carnelian, and other material for ornaments decreased (Wright 1981:272-75).

In sum, Late Uruk Deh Luran had a small population involved in the production and export of quantities of unfinished animal products, bitumen, and chipped stone, perhaps under the control of a central institution. From the broader Uruk world, they received modest supplies of consumer goods

but few exotic commodities. It seems likely that an outside polity, whether Susa or some other, took direct control of Deh Luran and its strategic route and exploited local sources of stone, bitumen, and perhaps wood, as well as the pasturage of the area.

On the Plain of Izeh or Malanir, 155 km east-southeast, or five to six days' travel from Shush (see fig. 6.1), a very different situation developed. The Izeh Plain is a basin in the midst of the central Zagros, only 750 m above sea level, though surrounded by peaks reaching as high as 3,100 m. It covers only about 135 km², including two seasonal lakes on its floor. It receives ample rainfall throughout the winter and has excellent land for grazing and dry farming but only a few springs that provide water during the dry summer. Oak forests cover the mountain slopes and may have spread onto the plain in the past, but there are few mineral resources. We know of events on this plain through detailed archaeological survey and through soundings at the small Uruk center of Tepe Zabarjad (Wright 1979, 1986b).

The Izeh Plain seems to have been settled continuously from the early fifth millennium into the Early Uruk period, when a small center and a large village indicate that the maximum population of the plain was about 2,400 people (Wright 1979: 59, fig. 26). Neither settlement was close to a permanent water source, suggesting they may not have been fully inhabited during the summer. The absence of smaller settlements, which are common in several earlier and later periods, suggests that Early Uruk settlements were not secure. We have few excavated samples from Early Uruk layers, but the ceramics from the surfaces of sites are similar to the earlier Uruk ceramics that developed on the Susiana Plain. This contrasts to those of Deh Luran, which are in a northern tradition.

Only the small center at Tepe Zabarjad survived into the earlier Middle Uruk period, and it diminished in size, with at most 500 inhabitants (Wright 1979: 59). Small excavations in the center revealed the familiar technology of sickles, grinding stones, bowls, and jars. The pottery is identical to ceramics from contemporary sites on the Susiana Plain (Wright 1979: 69-81). Our small soundings revealed only a remnant of the stone footing of a small wall. However, a mass of partially burned mud brick and a group of smashed bevel-rim bowls in a pit indicate that mud-brick buildings had been built and repaired. The lack of evidence of administrative technology such as sealings or counters may be a result of the intensive weathering of the upper layers of the site.

At least a quarter of the animals consumed around modest housing in the center were hunted pigs and gazelles. Domestic sheep and goat bone were the most common bones. Although we lack sufficient samples to construct age curves and sex ratios and assess exploitation, all elements of both old and young animals are present, suggesting local herding. Cow bone, however,

constituted 12 percent of the discarded material, the largest proportion known from any southwestern Iranian Uruk site (Redding 1979). The restricted Izeh Plain, with its bitter winters, is not an ideal area for cattle. This raises the possibility that the Middle Uruk outpost at Zabargad received supplies of cattle from elsewhere, perhaps from the Susa area. Even though the sickle blades suggest plants were locally harvested, we have no evidence regarding plant use. Imported durable goods include a few ceramic vessels, copper, and small quantities of finished blade tools of both coarse- and fine-grained cherts (Wright 1979: 81–82). In sum, earlier Middle Uruk Izeh had one small settlement with no evidence of durable exports. From the broader Uruk world, however, the occupants received modest supplies of cattle, consumer goods, and exotic commodities.

In succeeding later Middle Uruk times, the Izeh Plain was abandoned; the only outpost in the area was on the high rock of Qaleh Tul, 20 km to the south. This is the time when Choghla Mish was reestablished on the vacant northeastern portion of the Susiana Plain (Johnson 1973: 109–11). By Late Uruk times, all the mountain valleys of the central Zagros seem to have been abandoned; the nearest settlement was the outpost of Qaleh-i Rodeni (KS-171), on the eastern margin of the Susiana Plain (Johnson 1973: 143–47). At this time or not long after, a major center and series of large villages related to the "Proto-Elamite" Banesh phase of Tal-i Malyan on the southern Iranian Plateau (see fig. 6, 1) were founded on the Izeh Plain (Sajidi 1979). It is reasonable to relate the withdrawal of communities with close relations to Middle Uruk Susa from the mountains, the founding of Choghla Mish and nearby settlements, and the emplacement of Banesh-related communities in Izeh as facets of a prolonged period of conflict in the mountains. In this context, the sustaining of the outpost at Zabargad, in a region that had no exceptional resources, can be seen as a tactic used by the rulers of Shush to protect a difficult frontier, a tactic that was ultimately unsuccessful.

There are indications of yet other strategies by which the larger polities dealt with or exploited marginal peoples. Some formerly populated plains seem to have had no sedentary communities, for example the Kuh-i Dashk Plain in the mountains of inner Luristan to the north of Susa (Goff 1971; Wright 1986b: 146–47). Other mountain plains that maintained prosperous local populations have evidence of small numbers of Uruk residents, whose presence could only result from some kind of negotiated diplomatic agreement. The Godin V fortified oval compound in the largest local center on the Kangavar Plain, with its sealings, tablets, and pottery locally made but in Late Uruk style (Weiss and Young 1975; Young 1986), may be evidence of such a relationship.

In addition to the sedentary peoples of the smaller peripheral valleys, the leaders of larger polities had to deal with transhumant and nomadic com-

munities whose archaeological traces are poorly known. While the campsites and cemeteries of such people seem rare and show none of the evidence of hierarchical organization notable after 3000 BC (Wright 1986b: 147–49), they do exist. Smaller interstitial mountain valleys, for example the Hutalian Plain just southeast of Kuh-i Dashk (Mortensen 1976; Wright 1986b: 146–47), have campsites probably of Middle or Late Uruk times. Similar campsites have been found on the arid lowland plains elsewhere in Mesopotamia (Berbeck 1993); it seems likely that future survey in the arid foothills will reveal similar evidence in southwestern Iran. Although nomadic people may not have posed a military threat to larger polities, they probably sought goods from farmers and townspeople in return for animal products.

SOUTHWEST IRAN AS AN ELEMENT IN GREATER MESOPOTAMIA

It is not my purpose in this essay to outline the nexus of early societies that developed throughout Southwest Asia during the fourth millennium, but a few comments on the broader relations of the Late and Middle Uruk Susiana polities may help us understand their organization. Not much is known of the broader relations of Early Uruk communities in general, or on the Susiana Plain in particular, but there is little reason to believe that anything other than a development of local communities in interaction with their neighbors occurred. Early and Middle Uruk ceramics from the Susiana Plain show local features related to earlier assemblages and provide no evidence of massive immigration (contra Algaze 1993a: 11–18), though the movement of smaller groups—traders, craft specialists, herders, soldiers, or refugees—seems likely to have occurred at various points in the long period under discussion (cf. Johnson 1988–89).

By Middle Uruk times, there is evidence that bitumen, alabaster, and chert from hinterland valleys was moved to settlements on the Susiana Plain. As noted above, animal products appear to have been exported from the Deh Luran Plain and imported into the Izeh Plain. Items from distant regions, such as marine shell from the Persian Gulf, copper and carnelian probably from the Iranian Plateau, and obsidian from the Anatolian Plateau, also reached southwestern Iran, albeit in small quantities. Whether such materials moved as a result of direct visits to distant sources, social gifts, or systems of trade, we cannot yet say. However, larger quantities of some materials were moved between regions. Half of the chert artifacts in predominantly Middle Uruk samples from Abu Sabikh, a town on a former course of the Euphrates, 200 km west of Farkhabad, result from medium gray chert blade cores of the sort procured from sources between the Deh Luran and Susiana Plains (Pope and Pollock 1995; Wright 1981: 262–72). Other cherts

common at Abu Sabikh may have been brought down the Euphrates from Syria, and the quantities of bitumen found at the site could have come either from southwestern Iran or the middle Euphrates.

With such mass movement of materials, however, it was organized, it is not surprising that some larger Late Uruk polity reached out to control sources of chert, bitumen, goat hair products, and woods on or near the Deh Luran Plain. The evidence does not indicate whether this polity was centered at Susa or at a center on the Euphrates (Wright 1981:187-88). The presence of a major Middle Uruk trading partner on the Euphrates and the evidence of conflict within the Susiana Plain, discussed below, suggest that the center of control was on the Euphrates. This economic takeover may not have involved overt conflict; given Deh Luran's tiny settled population, mere threat may have been enough to bring it under the control of stronger neighbors.

It is clear that Middle Uruk Susiana had a direct interest in areas of the Zagros to the east. As discussed above, while the little settlement cluster in Deh Luran to the west maintained its own local ceramic style, those in Izeh and other valleys to the east used ceramics identical to those of Susa. There is no evidence that relations between southwestern Iran and areas to the east involved the mass movement of materials. It is possible that Susa was interested in low volumes of high-value goods such as copper. It is also possible that its interests were not economic at all but simply involved securing its frontier against expanding plateau communities. In any event, the abandonment of mountain valleys and the settling of Chogha Mish on the eastern Susiana Plain at about the same time is difficult to understand unless external force was being exerted.

Given the pressures from both the east and the west, it is not surprising that problems within the Susiana polity were exacerbated. Johnson (1973:143-56, 1987, 1988-89) has argued cogently that Late Uruk settlement patterns and iconography indicate conflict between the western plain under Susa and the eastern plain under Chogha Mish. Chogha Mish was abandoned before the end of the Late Uruk period, and Susa itself was abandoned near its end. Their populations could have moved as refugees to other parts of Southwest Asia, leaving the rich Susiana Plain with few inhabitants (Alden 1987).

LESSONS LEARNED

The diverse, if far from comprehensive, evidence assembled here allows a qualitative evaluation of the operation of the first states in southwestern Iran and their impact on the lives of their inhabitants. It is clear that goods and labor were extracted from rural producers, probably to support rural elites,

and both elite and ordinary town dwellers. Figures with complementary hierarchical roles in a system of control acted to control the movement of labor or the flow of goods, as well as to keep records of transactions. They also acted to maintain their own institutional apparatus, building and maintaining installations, manufacturing appropriate paraphernalia, and no doubt using it in the impressive rituals portrayed in some of the cylinder seals. In bad years, some ordinary producers did receive assistance from central institutions, but an ordered life of reciprocal relations may have benefited only some of the participants in the state and for only limited periods of time. At other times conflict broke out, politics were shattered, and people became refugees. A more measured assessment of the relations within these states and of how these relations developed over the several centuries of the Uruk period in Mesopotamia will be possible only after future cycles of fieldwork have been completed.

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