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Articles:

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Subsistence Economy and the Emergence of Economic Differentiation in Neolithic Mesopotamia: An Economic Archaeology Perspective
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Translations:

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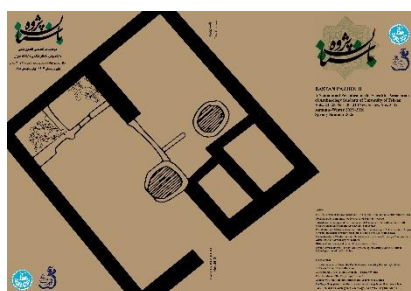
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Design: Depiction of Burials F10 and F11 and the storage area
in the plan of Building II, Phase A3, Hajji Firuz
(Voigt 1983, 297; Thomalsky, 2023: 276–278)

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1	The Interaction of Environment, Subsistence, and Ritual in the Neolithization of Anatolia	
	Arghavan Abdolmalaki	2
Chapter 2	A speleothem record from the Fertile Crescent covering the last deglaciation better contextualizes neolithization	
	Persian Translation of a Previously Published Article	
	Original authors: Regattieri et al	
	Persian Translator: Zahra Khalili and Nemat Hariri	43
Chapter 3	Obsidian and Communication Networks among Early Settlements	
	Arsam Shahbazi	60
Chapter 4	Subsistence Economy and the Emergence of Economic Differentiation in Neolithic Mesopotamia: An Economic Archaeology Perspective	
	Amirali Rezaie	72
Chapter 5	Co-Habitation? Death and Life at Hajji Firuz, NW-Iran	
	Original Author: Judith Thomalsky	
	Persian Translator: Arghavan Abdolmalaki	82
Chapter 6	The Master and Mistress of Animals Motif in Elamite Glyptic Art: A Semiotic Approach to Visual Interactions with Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium BCE	
	Asal Shahramivard	106
Chapter 7	Reconstruction of Professions and Subsistence Structures of Iron Age Communities in Gilan Based on Archaeological	
	Parastoo Taghizadeh	117
Chapter 8	Connectivity and Communication in the Achaemenid Empire	
	Original Author: Henry P. Colburn	
	Persian Translator: Afshin Bostanian	132
Chapter 9	The The Headdress of the Tillya Tepe “Prince”	
	Original Author: Michael Shenkar	
	Persian Translator: Behzad Sedaghati	149
Chapter 10	Revisiting the Chronology and Interpretation of Sasanian Material Culture from the East Wing Excavation of Urmia Jameh Mosque	

	Saeid Sattarnejad, Ebrahim Badaghi, Mahan Younespour, Masoud Khancharli	165
Chapter 11	History of archaeological research in Semnan province	
	Behzad Sedaghati	178
Chapter 12	Reading village plans: Architecture and social change in northeastern of Iran	
	Original Author: Lee Horne	
	Persian Translator: Sara Rahimkhani	200
Chapter 13	The Some Remarks on Analogy in Archaeology – And Why They Still Matter	
	Original Author: Sabine Reinhold	
	Persian Translator: Sara Rahimkhani	209
Chapter 14	Beyond Archaeological Trends: An Epistemological Critique and a Relational Reconfiguration of the Discipline	
	Amir Abbas Khalilpour	221
Chapter 15	Activity Report of the Scientific Association of Archaeology Students of University of Tehran, 2025–2026	230



The Interaction of Environment, Subsistence, and Ritual in the Neolithization of Anatolia

Arghavan Abdolmalaki¹

Abstract

Through a review of archaeological research and findings from key sites, particularly those in the Upper Tigris and Euphrates basins, this study examines the relationships between climatic change, subsistence, and ritual in the Neolithization of Anatolia. Climatic fluctuations at the end of the Pleistocene, particularly the return to colder conditions during the Younger Dryas and changes in patterns of resource availability, contributed to the development of new subsistence and settlement strategies, including sedentism and food storage. Archaeological evidence indicates that permanent settlements, storage practices, symbolic behavior, and complex mortuary practices had emerged at some sites before the appearance and expansion of food-producing economies. During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, small-scale cultivation of wild plants, animal management, and the domestication of plants and animals gradually developed at some sites, while hunting and gathering continued for an extended period. Neolithic ritual practices can also be understood as contributing to social cohesion, coordination, and the organization of labor. At the same time, evidence of differences in burial practices and patterns of food consumption at certain sites reveals emerging forms of gender and social differentiation. Taken together, the evidence suggests that cultural factors, particularly ritual practices and social organization, played a role in creating the conditions for the emergence and expansion of agriculture. Variations in the sequence and timing of subsistence, social, and ritual transformations across different sites challenge explanations of Neolithization based on a single, unidirectional causal sequence. Accordingly, the Neolithization of Anatolia was a gradual, polycentric process shaped by the interplay of environmental conditions, subsistence practices, social structures, and symbolic systems.

Keywords: Neolithization, Anatolia, Sedentism, Pre-Pottery Neolithic, Ritual Practices, Agriculture, Domestication.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 2-42

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Obsidian and Communication Networks among Early Settlements

Arsam Shahbazi²

Abstract

Stone tools are among the earliest human-made artifacts and were used during prehistory for hunting, cutting, and other daily activities. These tools were made from various types of stone, one of the most important being obsidian, a volcanic glass. The significance of obsidian extends beyond its suitability for tool production. Its geological sources have a limited geographical distribution, and the discovery of obsidian tools and artifacts at considerable distances from these sources can provide evidence of material movement and connections between human settlements. The geochemical properties of obsidian also make it possible to determine the provenance of artifacts and identify their raw material sources, thereby enabling the investigation of distribution patterns and connections among prehistoric communities. Through a review of studies on obsidian in the Near East, particularly Anatolia and the Zagros region, the present study examines obsidian sources, provenance determination methods, and patterns of obsidian movement and exchange during the Neolithic period. A review of these studies indicates that the distribution of obsidian was not determined solely by the distance between communities and raw material sources; factors such as cultural choices and technological traditions also played a role in shaping patterns of its use and circulation. Furthermore, the presence of non-local obsidian at a site cannot, in itself, be regarded as evidence of direct trade. Rather, such data, when considered alongside technological and typological analyses of artifacts, can contribute to our understanding of communication networks and interactions among Neolithic communities.

Keywords: Obsidian, Anatolia, Stone Tools, Early Settlements, Lithic Tools, Neolithic.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 60-71

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Subsistence Economy and the Emergence of Economic Differentiation in Neolithic Mesopotamia: An Economic Archaeology Perspective

Amirali Rezaie³

Abstract

The Neolithic period represents one of the most significant periods of transformation in the history of human societies, during which subsistence practices, human relationships with natural resources, and settlement patterns underwent fundamental changes. However, the transition to food production was a gradual, multi-pathway process shaped by environmental and social conditions and cannot be reduced merely to the replacement of hunting and gathering with agriculture and animal husbandry. Drawing on an economic archaeology approach, the present study examines the subsistence economies of Neolithic communities in Mesopotamia and its surrounding regions, emphasizing the diversity of food procurement strategies, animal management, production and storage, raw material movement, and the socioeconomic consequences of these processes. The research employs a descriptive-analytical method based on a review of published literature and the analysis of archaeological data from sites such as Jarmo, Abu Hureyra, Çayönü, and Hallan Çemi. The findings indicate that Neolithic communities employed a combination of hunting, gathering, plant cultivation, animal management and domestication, and participation in regional networks. Furthermore, recent archaeozoological and archaeobotanical research suggests that food production and domestication in the eastern Fertile Crescent developed through gradual and multicentric processes. Storage and the movement of raw materials also created new opportunities for resource management; however, the presence of storage facilities or surplus cannot, in itself, be equated with the emergence of persistent inequality. Accordingly, the Neolithic subsistence economy of Mesopotamia should be understood as a dynamic, multi-component system in which production, consumption, storage, exchange, and control over resources interacted with social structures, creating conditions for the emergence of economic differentiation.

Keywords: Neolithic, Mesopotamia, Subsistence Economy, Economic Archaeology, Domestication, Storage, Exchange, Economic Differentiation.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 72-8

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The Master and Mistress of Animals Motif in Elamite Glyptic Art: A Semiotic Approach to Visual Interactions with Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium BCE

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Abstract:

The "Master of Animals" motif represents one of the most enduring and widespread iconographic themes in ancient Near Eastern art, typically depicting an anthropomorphic figure asserting dominance over, controlling, or contending with one or more animals. Employing the semiotic framework of Ferdinand de Saussure, this study presents a comparative analysis of third-millennium BCE glyptic evidence from Elam and Mesopotamia, with a particular focus on the representations of the Master and Mistress of Animals. The findings indicate that within the Mesopotamian tradition, one of the prominent manifestations of this motif is a nude male figure distinguished by knotted curls and a beard, designated in scholarship by various terms such as the "nude hero," the "priest-king," or a mythological entity. Conversely, an examination of Proto-Elamite seals from Susa reveals that direct representations of human figures are exceedingly rare during this period, with composite and animal motifs playing a far more prominent role in organizing the visual field. Furthermore, the "Mistress of Animals" motif is virtually absent from the third-millennium BCE Mesopotamian glyptic repertoire; rather, it appears with notable prominence only in the second-millennium BCE evidence associated with the Syro-Mitanni cultural sphere. In contrast, the Elamite attestations of this motif exhibit distinct structural and compositional configurations. These divergences between the sign systems of the two civilizations demonstrate that formal similarities in iconography do not necessarily signify semantic equivalence. The ancient Near East can thus be conceptualized not as an undifferentiated "unified visual language," but rather as an expansive constellation of distinct semantic and semiotic systems interacting within broader networks of cultural exchange and transmission. Consequently, structural divergences in these sign systems reflect distinct conceptions of power, legitimacy, and the ontological relationship among humanity, the animal realm, and the surrounding cosmos in the Elamite visual tradition.

Keywords: Semiotics, Master of Animals, Elamite Seals, Mesopotamia, Third Millennium BCE.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 106-116

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Reconstruction of Professions and Subsistence Structures of Iron Age Communities in Gilan Based on Archaeological Objects

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Abstract

The present study, relying on archaeological data from western Gilan - particularly the Iron Age sites and cemeteries in the Talesh and Rezvanshahr regions - attempts to reconstruct the relationship between material culture and the subsistence structures of communities during that period. The main issue is the extent to which objects recovered from burial contexts can reflect the professions, occupations, technical specializations, and lifeways of Iron Age peoples. The data for this article have been obtained from a thesis study on objects, professions, and occupations of the Iron Age in Gilan, as well as from a number of reliable Persian and non-Persian sources related to burial patterns, weaponry, architecture, dietary regimes, and cultural interactions of the Iron Age in Gilan and northern Iran. The research method is descriptive-analytical and based on documentary and comparative analysis of published archaeological data. The results indicate that the diversity of burial objects in the Iron Age cemeteries of Gilan—particularly gray and black pottery, weaponry, jewelry, equestrian equipment, and certain stone and metal artifacts—is not merely an indication of burial rituals, but also serves as important evidence for identifying subsistence structures and the social division of labor. The abundance of weapons and arrowheads on the one hand, and the presence of bits, harnesses, and horse burials on the other, point to the importance of hunting, warfare, and animal husbandry—especially horse breeding. Evidence related to pottery-making, metalworking, stone carving, and the construction of stone burial spaces also attests to the existence of specialized skills and the transmission of technical knowledge in these communities. Furthermore, bioarchaeological data and analyses related to dietary regimes show that the consumption of animal meat and fish played a significant role in the nutritional pattern of the region's inhabitants. In general, the Iron Age communities of Gilan can be considered as communities with a mixed economy, based on animal husbandry, hunting, exploitation of water resources, and possessing handicrafts and metalworking, which, while connected to the mountainous and forested environment, were also in contact with neighboring cultural zones.

Keywords: Iron Age, Gilan, Talesh, Material Culture, Subsistence, Professions, Archaeological Objects, Burial.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 117-131

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Revisiting the Chronology and Interpretation of Sasanian Material Culture from the East Wing Excavation of Urmia Jameh Mosque

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Abstract

The Jameh Mosque of Urmia is one of the oldest religious structures from the Islamic period in the Azerbaijan region of Iran, consistently holding a significant place in historical and archaeological studies. Although numerous research projects have examined various aspects of this monument, some of its historical and cultural dimensions still require more meticulous evaluation. The present paper aims to critique and analyze one of the recently published studies on this mosque, specifically examining the article titled "Study and Introduction of Cultural Materials Related to the Sasanian Period in the Excavation of the Eastern Side of the Jameh Mosque of Urmia" by Hamed Noorsi, Samer Nazari, Leila Gargari, Behnam Ghanbari, and Abbas Bavarsaei. This article was published in the Payam-e Bastanshenas Journal, Volume 15, Number 29 (Autumn and Winter 2023-2024). The results of the critical evaluation indicate that despite presenting cultural materials obtained from one season of archaeological excavation within the precinct of the Urmia Jameh Mosque, the analyses and interpretations offered in this study face serious challenges and deficiencies. The most important criticisms of the article can be summarized into three main axes: 1- Manipulation and biased reinterpretation of the cultural materials recovered from the excavation layers to confirm the authors' hypothesis; 2- Lack of sufficient familiarity with contemporary Sasanian archaeological sites in northwestern Iran and, consequently, a failure to cite reliable sources and research in this field; 3- Violation of research ethics principles and the unreliability of the results due to potential data manipulation and analyses based on insufficient evidence. Accordingly, although the article under review is recent in terms of publication date and presents some new cultural findings, particularly concerning pottery, its scientific value remains limited due to deficiencies in methodology, data interpretation, and non-compliance with research ethical standards. Therefore, its final results cannot be employed as a valid basis for future historical or archaeological analyses.

Keywords: Critical Review, Urmia Jameh Mosque, Archaeological Evidence, Research Ethics.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 165-177

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History of archaeological research in Semnan province

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Abstract

The history of archaeological research in Iran dates back to the nineteenth century. Since Semnan Province has long been situated along the route linking the western and eastern parts of the Iranian Plateau, as well as the so-called Silk Road, it is regarded as one of the archaeologically rich provinces of Iran. Systematic archaeological research in Semnan Province also began approximately a century ago. Accordingly, the present study examines the history of archaeological investigations conducted in this province over the past hundred years. The approach adopted in this article is a critical review of the research carried out to date, with the aim of identifying its strengths and weaknesses and proposing practical strategies for more effective policymaking in future archaeological scholarship. The methodology of this study is based on library research, the use of published fieldwork reports, and in-person interviews with a number of researchers active in this field. The principal research question concerns the extent of archaeological investigations undertaken in the province, categorized by county. The secondary questions addressed in this article include whether the research conducted across the province has been question-driven; which periods and regions have been the primary focus of archaeological investigations in Semnan Province; what gaps remain in this regard; and what strategies may be proposed to promote the development of archaeological research activities in the province in the future.

The results indicate that, although archaeology in Semnan Province initially emerged in connection with the expansion of the railway and the implementation of rescue excavations during the 1930s, it subsequently developed through more question-oriented studies. Following the Islamic Revolution, despite a brief interruption, rescue excavations resumed in the province from the mid-1980s onward. Thereafter, with the arrival of international teams and the transformation in the orientation of Iranian archaeology from the 2000s onward, archaeological research in Semnan Province was increasingly directed toward question-based approaches. It also became clear that archaeological investigations were initially concentrated in the city of Damghan, whereas in the years following the Islamic Revolution, most excavations were carried out in Shahroud County and subsequently in other counties. Moreover, research in the earlier years was primarily focused on sites dating to the historic periods, while in recent years greater attention has been devoted to prehistoric periods. On this basis, the uneven development of archaeological research, the lack of a question-driven approach in many of the studies conducted, the non-publication or delayed publication of fieldwork reports, and the absence of university participation in provincial research constitute the principal weaknesses of archaeology in Semnan Province. These shortcomings, however, may be addressed through proper management, the establishment of cultural heritage bases, and the active involvement of universities.

Keywords: Semnan Province, Archaeology, Shahroud, Damghan, Iran, Archaeological studies.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 178-199

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Beyond Archaeological Trends: An Epistemological Critique and a Relational Reconfiguration of the Discipline

Amir Abbas Khalilpour¹

Abstract

The history of archaeological thought is commonly organized through categories such as “trends,” “schools,” and “paradigms.” Although these categories are useful for describing theoretical developments within the discipline, treating them as fundamental boundaries between distinct forms of archaeological knowledge requires epistemological reconsideration. This paper critically examines the concept of “archaeological trends” and argues that differences among culture-historical, processual, post-processual, and critical approaches do not necessarily constitute separate or mutually exclusive epistemic domains. Without denying their historical and methodological differences, the paper proposes that such approaches can instead be understood as shifts in theoretical emphasis and modes of questioning within a shared material field. A relational perspective is therefore introduced not as another archaeological “trend,” but as a framework for reconsidering theoretical plurality in archaeology through the interrelations among humans, materials, bodies, spaces, memories, and environments. The discussion of politics, embodiment, memory, and consumption further demonstrates that archaeological inquiry is not necessarily defined by a fixed chronological period or thematic specialization. Rather, its archaeological character emerges from the ways in which material traces, contexts, transformations, and relations are investigated and interpreted. The paper ultimately argues that “trend” is more appropriately understood as a historiographical and pedagogical category than as a fundamental basis for defining the nature of archaeology. From this perspective, archaeology is not primarily a collection of competing schools, but a relational mode of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the world through its material traces and relations.

Keywords: Archaeology; Archaeological Theory; Trends; Epistemology; Relational Archaeology.

Read the article in [the full issue](#): pp. 221-229

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