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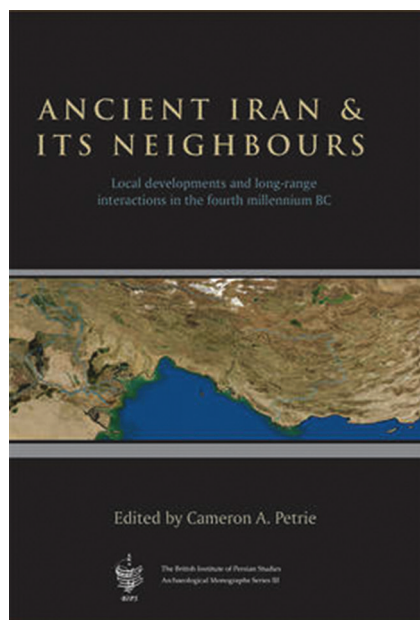
NATURAL SCIENCES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Book Reviews

Ancient Iran & Its Neighbours: Local developments and long-range interactions in the fourth millennium BC, 1st Edition, Cameron A. Petrie, Oxbow Books 2013, ISBN 978-1-78297-227-3, 400 pages (hardcover).



As an archaeological site of ancient history, Iran belongs to the most significant, if not to the most important, regions in the Middle East. Incredible realms and empires arose, prospered, declined and disappeared, but their legacy survived and new kingdoms could be created on their remains. The archeology of the Near East points to the origin of world-changing discoveries and cultures from a very exact location – Ancient Iran and its neighbours. But the historical research of the area of ancient Iran concentrates on the legacy of the Elamites, Medes or Achaemenids, and the fourth millennium BC quite often remains on the edge of interest. However, this reviewed book covers in detail those “critical periods of socio-economic and political transformation.”

Ancient Iran & Its Neighbours is a collection of twenty contributions from

thirty-three international authors regarding all aspects of archaeological research and the history of the territory belonging to ancient Iran during the fourth millennium BC. Scholars, mostly from European, American, Iranian and other universities, deal with fundamental topics, including the environment, landscape, sites, technologies, synthesis, etc. The publication by Oxbow Books (2013) was given the subtitle: “Local developments and long-range interactions in the fourth millennium BC” and edited by Cameron A. Petrie (Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge). The book came about under the patronage of The British Institute of Persian Studies, which is a self-governing charity bringing together distinguished scholars and others with an interest in Iranian and Persian studies.

The layout of the volume is not chronologically structured. After the introduction (by the editor Cameron A. Petrie), the second and third chapters provide an overview of the environment, ecology, landscape and subsistence in Iran (by Matthew Jones *et al.*, Kristine Hopper and T.J. Wilkinson). The next ten contributions explore sites and regions of chosen archaeological research. There are parts with really interesting chapters, including a wide spectrum of themes written by various authors. Further chapters, numbered from fifteen to eighteen, discuss the technologies of craft and administration (by Lloyd Weeks, Holly Pittman, Roger Matthews, Jacob Dahl *et al.*). The last two studies present a synthesis and discussion (by Susan Pollock, Cameron A. Petrie).

There are many chapters to analyze and discuss in more detail. “The Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age in the Qazvin and Tehran Plains” (p. 107, chap 7), written by the Iranian authors Hasan Fazeli Nashli, Hamid Reza Valipour and Mohammed Hossein Azizi Kharanaghi, has a lot of visual utilities, tables, charts and other tools, which are of great help in this particular era. And the paper written by Jacob Dahl, Cameron A. Petrie and D. T. Potts “*Chronological parameters of the*

earliest writing system in Iran” (p. 353, chap. 18) should be a really helpful study material for university students.

But there is one contribution that impressed me the most: Lloyd Weeks (Department of Archeology, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom) has written a chapter with the title “*Iranian metallurgy of the fourth millennium BC in its wider technological and cultural contexts*” (p. 277, chap. 15). In its introduction, this author shows the importance of the development of the following metal metallurgy: copper, lead, gold and silver. From a metallurgical perspective this Iranian evidence is critical for understanding and characterizing the development of early metallurgy. The most significant archaeological sites are mentioned – Ghabristan, Tepe Hissar, Zagros, Tal-i Iblis, Arisman and many others. The following pages talk about the expansion of evidence from the fourth millennium, which witnesses the wide dispersion of metal processing. The majority of the found remains are connected almost exclusively (as was mentioned above) with lead, silver, gold and copper. The same chapter continues with a text passage on which I became really focused on, from the moment I first opened this book – mining. However, as I supposed, there is a very limited amount of evidence from this research time period (4th millennium BC). This is due to the limited amount of field research regarding mining. The next section deals with the technological context of metallurgy, technological transfer and its mechanisms.

Another paper I have to mention is titled “*A bridge between worlds: south-western Iran during the fourth millennium BC*” (p. 51, chap. 4) by Henry T. Wright (Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, USA). This particular study belongs to that of “must read” for everyone interested in the ancient history of Iran or any other field of research connected with this topic. Wright describes how the locality of Susa (Shushan, Shush) affected the whole region, not just for present-day Iran, but also for all its neighbours. Susa

is one of the oldest cities in the world. Excavations have established the existence of urban structures of about 4000 BC. Susa used to be the centre of a highly-organized province famous for their handicraft, which is proven by its rich sites of ceramics, mostly jars, decorated by symbolic motives. The ceramics found in the *Terminal Susa Plain* can be compared to the very well-known and beautifully-decorated ceramics from the *Early Uruk* era. The city became the capital of Elam and was able to challenge the Sumerian and Akkadian towns in southern Iraq. The thing I really miss in this study is the lack of information concerning methods of decoration.

The locality of Susa from the previous chapter is a great link to the paper from

Holly Pittman (History of Art, University of Pennsylvania, USA) “*Imagery in administrative context: Susiana and the west in the fourth millennium BC*” (p. 293, chap. 15). In this early age, the potters of Susa produced ceramics of an unsurpassed quality, decorated with many kinds of birds, mountain goats, and other designs displaying animals. The bow and arrow are the symbol of sovereignty and government. The sun – the heavenly deity, is the highest (there is a very interesting thing for all scholars studying cloisonné, where the sign for the sun is a star). There are many more symbols of gods and divinities in Susiana mythology. In early Susiana symbolism, it is possible to find references to entities of the world of invisibility, not just the world of humanity.

Ancient Iran & its Neighbours: Local developments and long-range interactions in the fourth millennium BC is a collection of valuable contributions and studies given together by scholars and researchers from all over the world. In summary, Petrie’s book provides an excellent introduction to the process of the substantial and much-researched part of prehistoric Iran and of the evidence that pertains to the growing social complexity in all its political, economic and religious dimensions. As a whole, this book demonstrates a wide variability of approaches. This is a truly impressive work of scholarship that will have a very long shelf life.

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