The ‘Intercultural Style’ Revisited

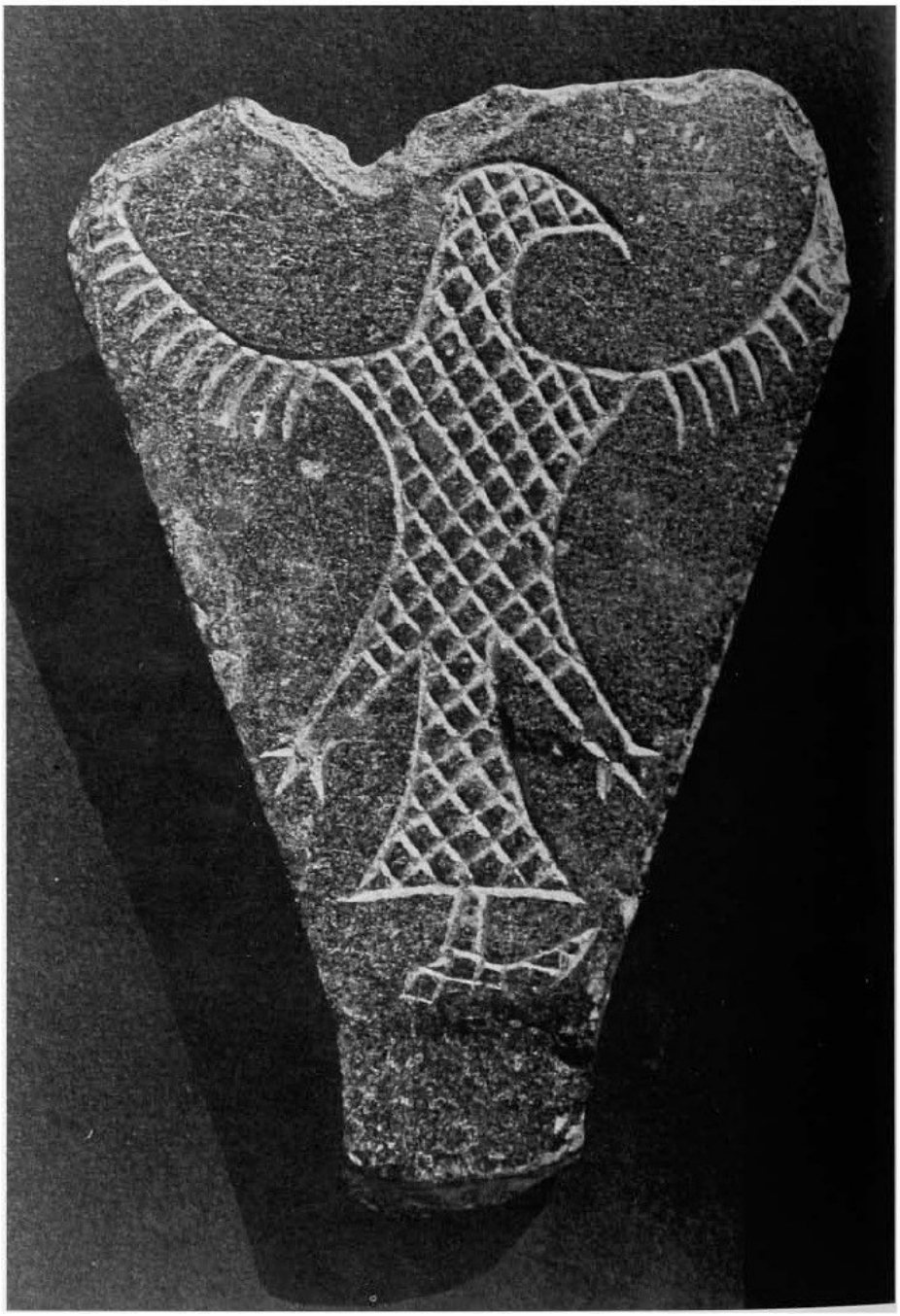

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Figure 1: on front page: ‘Intercultural Style’ ceremonial soft stone axe head with Imdugud design from Tepe Yahya IVb period (Lamberg-Karlovsky 2001: 216)

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The ‘Intercultural Style’ Revisited:

Intercultural Interaction in South-West Asia during the Mid-Third Millennium

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1. Introduction

1.1. Interpreting the “Intercultural Style”

This thesis explores what has become known as the “Intercultural Style” stone vessels. I shall investigate the meaning of their wider intercultural implications by reviewing the available literature on these vessels. In this way I hope to contribute to the debate on the nature and development of 3th millennium societies in the ancient Near East. The debate regarding the role of “Intercultural Style” stone vessels flourished during the 1970’s, when great quantities of “Intercultural Style” vessels and some associated production sites, were uncovered. Over the last decades this debate has come to a standstill, while new theoretical frameworks have become popular which can shed new light on the wider interpretation of the “Intercultural Style” vessels.

The Intercultural Style’s figurative and geometric patterns are easily distinguishable and found over an extensive area, from Mari in north-west Mesopotamia to Tarut in the Arabian Gulf, the central Asian Bactrian-complex and even into the early urban centers in the Indus Valley. The Intercultural Style incorporates stylistic elements from all these regions and is in this respect truly ‘Intercultural’. Nevertheless, based on the few excavated production sites of the Intercultural Style vessels, both raw resources and specialized production were focused on a few sites in a relatively small area in the south-western Iranian mountains, of which Tepe Yahya is the one best studied.

The period in which the Intercultural Style objects were produced, traded and utilized falls roughly in the mid-third millennium BC. According to Mesopotamian periodization this period coincides with the Late Early Dynastic period until the rise of Sargon of Agade in the 23rd century BC. This period shows an intensification of international or intercultural contacts and trade. Overland long distance trade routes connecting much of southeastern Asia emerged, shifted or faded away again, steadily giving ground to specific sea based trading routes. Along with this the strategic and logistical importance of regions shifted. Previously important Iranian sites like Tal-e Malyan were in decline or even abandoned altogether, while trading centers along the Arabian Gulf like those in Tarut, Bahrain and Oman grew rapidly.

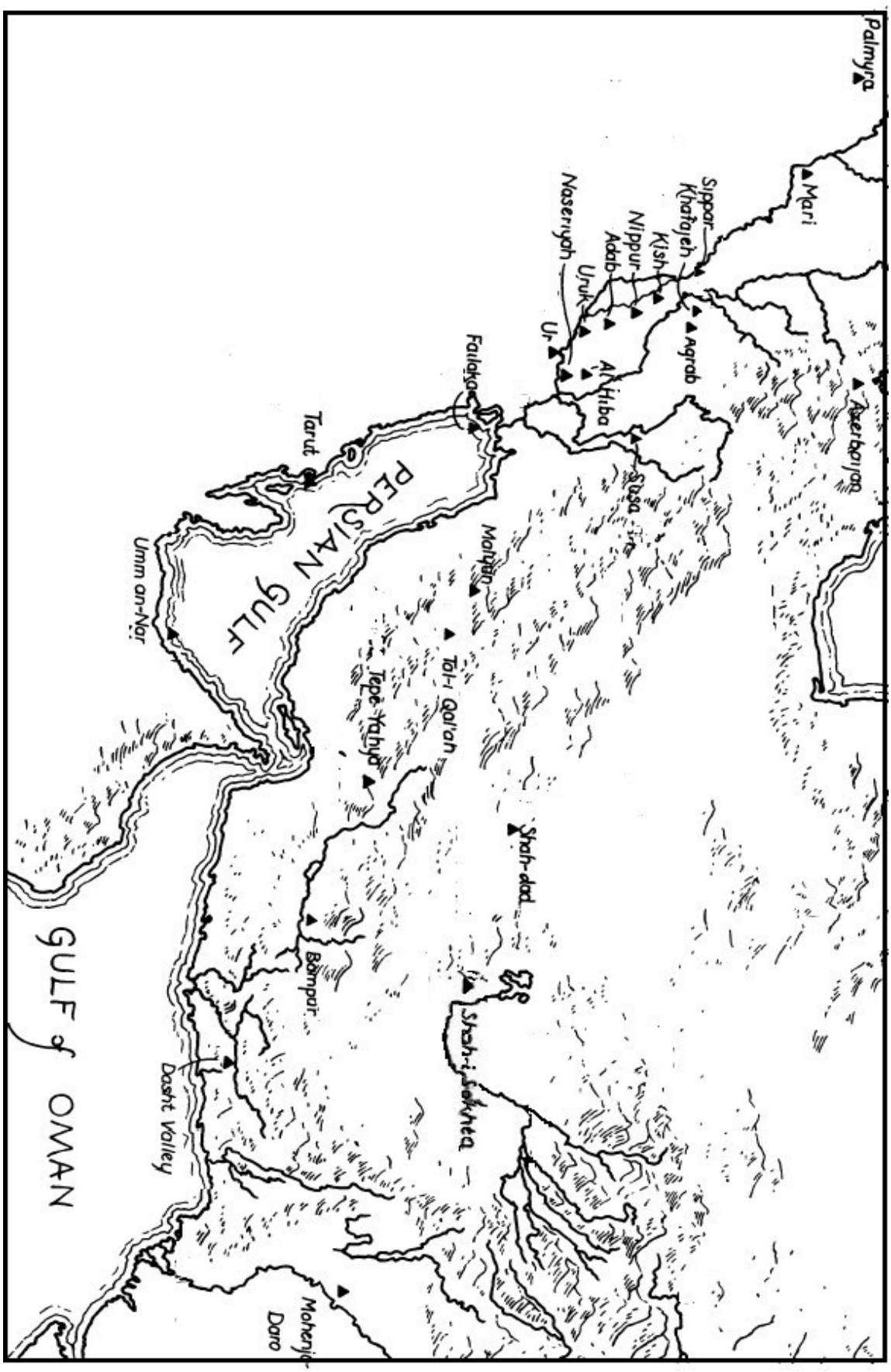

Figure 2: Map showing principal distribution-sites of the 'Intercultural Style' vessels (to Kohl 1987: 465)

Since the Intercultural Style soft stone vessels are distinct and clearly had a material and ideological value shared by many cultures, they may tell us a lot about the dynamics of interregional relations and exchange. This subject has been studied extensively during the 80s, most notably by Philip L. Kohl, within a framework employing world-system theory. World-system theory and the closely related acculturation model focus on the dynamics of intercultural connections between a core area and its periphery. In the view of Kohl, the dense urban areas of the Mesopotamian plains in the west and the Indus valley in the east could be seen as such core areas, while the expanse in between would serve as a less developed periphery. More recently post-processual archaeologists like Gil Stein have formulated new models describing interregional exchange. These new models borrowed certain elements of the World System theory, but added to these important post-processual notions such as human agency and ethnogenesis. Other World-System concepts such as the unidirectional exchange between core and periphery were completely rejected. In this thesis I wish to add a new theme to this interpretive discussion, by elaborating on some of the underlying mechanisms on how value of objects is perceived. Specifically, stone objects tend to be rather valuable, due to their weight, fragility and labor intensiveness to produce. In most likelihood the decorations which adorned the 'Intercultural Style' vessels must have added to their value. The symbolic value of these objects as culturally determined prestige objects or its religious connotations would increase their value even more.

1.2 Research questions

The main question that led to this thesis is what the Intercultural Style vessels tell us today about the nature of intercultural contacts during the mid-third millennium within its distribution area. To answer this broad question I shall explore three interrelated research questions.

1. What characteristics can intercultural contacts have?
    - How do intercultural contacts operate on a political or economic level?
        - What is the level of reciprocity as opposed to core dominance?
    - How do intercultural contacts translate on a ideological, cultural or religious level?
        - Do shared beliefs, mutual heritage, cultural similarities manifest themselves and if so how?
    - Has intercultural contact theory changed significantly over the last few decades?
2. What are Intercultural Style vessels?
    - What is their typology?
    - When were they produced?
    - Where were they produced?

- Why were they produced?
- For who were they produced?
- What did they mean?
- How were they exchanged?

3. What was the greater cultural, geographical and political context in which the Intercultural Style vessels were produced, exchanged and consumed?

1.3. About this thesis

In the following chapter this thesis provides a general theoretical framework concerning interregional or intercultural interaction. In it I describe both the processual World System theory and associated acculturation model and the modification or rejection of these inspired by the post-processual paradigm.

The third chapter focuses on the different aspects concerning the Intercultural Style vessels. It provides a general description of the Intercultural Style chlorite corpus, styles and decorations and goes into detail about the symbolic meaning of some of these decorations.

Chapter four contains a description of the 'international world' in the mid-third millennium. This description has to be brief, since both the geographical area in which the Intercultural Style was distributed and the relevant time frame are considerate. This chapter focuses separately on the different geographical or cultural areas within this 'international world', which are from west to east; the Mesopotamian Plains, Khuzestan and the Iranian Highlands, the Gulf region and the Indus valley. It also provides a general overview of the patterns of trade between these regions. The second part of this chapter provides a theoretical framework on how object value can be perceived and gives some general outlines on the trading mechanisms of long distance exchange in third millennium south and west Asia. It also includes an in-depth interpretation of the exchange-mechanisms, production and distribution of the 'Intercultural Style' vessels.

Chapter five provides a short outline on how the value of objects, especially luxury goods like highly decorated stone vessels, can be determined. It also offers a basis on how the voluntary or involuntary movement of objects can be explained. The last two paragraphs offer a brief interpretive discussion on the production, distribution, exchange and value of 'Intercultural Style' vessels

2. Modeling intercultural interaction

This chapter provides a theoretical basis for interpreting the intercultural relations between cultures as well as the mutability of a culture, or its aspects, under influence of external change. The processual World-System theory focused on the first aspect, while the Acculturation Model focused on the latter. Recent post-processual approaches to these subjects adapted or replaced the World-System Theory and the Acculturation Model in favor of more comprehensive intercultural interaction models. Important notions within these new models included human agency, transculturation and ethnogenesis. Last this chapter provides a summary on how the value of foreign, luxury objects can be understood and how this value is culturally or socially determined.

2.1. World-System Theory and the Acculturation Model

In 1974 Immanuel Wallerstein developed the world system theory to explain the emergence of modern capitalism and the unequal distribution of wealth across cultures (Wallerstein 1974). He defined a world system as a multicultural network of the exchange of necessities; the food and raw materials necessary for everyday life (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993:854). The colonial takeover of large parts of the world and the subsequent extraction or unequal exchange of great amounts of raw resources from the periphery, allowed Europe to become a rapidly developing core. The disparity in the flow of goods, labor and services led to systematic underdevelopment of the periphery and development of the core (Oka and Kosimba 2008:352). Through this process, the core incorporated large-scale diverse economies that specialize in the manufacture of high-value finished products for home consumption and export to the periphery. Furthermore the core controlled the periphery either directly by colonial administration or indirectly through weak local rulers dependent on the core (Stein 2002: 904).

While Wallerstein never intended his model to be adapted to a pre-1500 AD archaeological context, archaeologists quickly took off with his theory in order to analyze ancient economies using the systematic perspectives provided by the world-system theory. In 1987 Philip Kohl further increased archaeological interest in the world-system theory with his influential article: *“Ancient economy, transferable technologies and the Bronze Age world-system”* (Kohl 1987). The world-system model relied on three main assumptions: core dominance, core control over an asymmetric exchange system, and the causal primacy of long-distance interaction in structuring the political economy of the periphery (Stein 2002: 904). These assumptions

greatly downplay the internal dynamics of change of the periphery in favor of a one-way flow from the core outwards.

Archaeologists have often combined world-system theory with the acculturation model. Although the concept of acculturation was already in use since the late 19th century, it was first defined as a model by anthropologists during the 1930's (Herskovits, Linton and Redfield 1936). As its name implies, acculturation provides a framework to study the process in which smaller, less powerful groups or recipient cultures become more like the larger, culturally dominant societies that control them, which eventually leads to the assimilation (of parts) of the less dominant culture. Assumed is a natural desire of the recipient society to adopt the cultural aspects of the dominant society (Cussick 1998: 132 in Stein 2002:b905). Common historical examples of this process are Hellenization or Romanization and a contemporary example is the process of westernization.

It is the combination of the world-system theory and the acculturation model which allows a systematic analysis of the cultural and economic interaction between core and periphery and how these affect each other. Since their adoption by archaeologists both theories have been modified to better reflect the archaeological 'reality'. For example, in the prestige-goods model the core-periphery concept was combined with Polanyi's ideas about the long-distance exchange of prestige goods. World-systems are not necessarily based on the exchange of raw resources, but can also be maintained through the elite controlled exchange of prestige goods or high-value objects (Polanyi, Baugh and Ericson 1993: 10 in Oka and Kosimba 2008: 353). In another example, Chase-Dunn and Hall questioned the necessity of intercultural exploitation, domination and unequal exchange within a world-system (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993: 856).

The world-system theory and its many modifications or alternative versions as proposed by Chase-Dunn and Hall and others, all share the same theoretical flaws, which according to Stein limit their use as frameworks for the understanding of interregional interaction. The first flaw Stein recognized is the assumption that the economic, political, military and ideological control asserted by the core over the periphery is absolute, while actual analysis of the archaeological record gives us a much more complex picture of the dynamics of power. The second flaw is the unidirectional nature of cultural and ideological exchange from core to periphery, again based on the archaeological record the opposite can be seen as well. A final major flaw in both the world-system theory and the acculturation model is the often implicit assumption of the passive role of the periphery, devoid of agency or the capacity of autonomous action and development (Stein 2002: 905). Another important issue concerning

long-distance interactions, finally, is raised by Bevan (Bevan 2007). He suggests the adoption of a spatial equivalent to Braudel's temporal scales; structure, conjuncture and évenement (Braudel 1966: 13-14 in Bevan 2007: 28). Where world-system models operate mainly on the largest scale, specific regional characteristics and on a smaller scale communities and individual actions should not be overlooked (Bevan 2007: 28).

2.2. Towards a new model of interregional interaction and exchange

During the late nineties, these various criticisms led some archaeologists to a whole-sale rejection of the world-system theory and acculturation model. Others recognized them as too limited and simplified. The rigid models simply did not match the many different cultural contact situations archaeologists had to make sense of. These scholars made a fresh start, attempting to incorporate a broad range of new variables into more comprehensive interregional interaction models. An important shift in interregional interaction theory was the recognition that all participants in a 'world' system, and not just the core, play an active role in the organization of their interregional contacts. They also recognized that the way the different participants influence each other is not so straightforward either. For example, two important new concepts, proposed by Deagan, are the processes of transculturation and ethnogenesis, as opposed to unidirectional acculturation (Deagan 1998 in Stein 2002: 906). Transculturation deals with the emergence of new cultural phenomena under external influence. Ethnogenesis is about the emergence of ethnic group identity. These theories combined can explain how entirely new cultural groups can emerge as the result of interregional interaction, further increasing regional diversity within those cultures.

In his new article *"The Archaeology of Interregional Interaction"* Stein listed the main elements of these theoretical developments (Stein 2002: 907): First, he sees them as a fusion between processual and post-processual approaches. The processual part is the remnant of the world-system theory; an analytical framework, a concern with systemic regularities and the analysis of political economy. The post-processual part comprises the notions of agency, ideology, and historical contingency where applicable, as well as the active role of material culture in defining cultural identity. Secondly, Stein recognized a general rejection of the unidirectional exchange from core to periphery. Thirdly, the organization of cultural contact is multiscalar (Lightfood 1995 in Stein 2002: 907). To understand interaction we need to study both the 'top-down' perspective of the exchange-network and its organizing polities and a 'bottom-up' perspective of the social groups which make up each polity. A fourth element concerns the balance of power between the polities participating in the interregional exchange-system. While in some cases the

core-periphery dominance holds true, in general the balance seems to be on a more equal footing. Some factors which can influence this balance of power are distance and transportation economics, technological development, population size and composition, disease, military organization and the degree of social organization in each polity. The fifth element Stein recognised is that interacting complex societies are composed of a variety of groups, defined by among others ethnicity, class and gender (Lightfood et al. 1998 in Stein 2002: 907). Through ethnogenesis, intercultural interaction creates new group-identities, which further increases the variety within a society. These groups have their own agenda and often compete with each other. Connected to the heterogeneity of the interacting polities is an appreciation of internal formative processes as opposed to external dynamics in shaping the overall organization of the network. The last and most crucial aspect of the new approach to interaction, and possibly to archaeology as a whole, is the role of human agency in all parts and on all levels of the organization of interregional systems (Stein 2002: 907).

These fresh insights have significantly changed the way archaeologists approach ‘foreign’ material culture or styles in past societies. In the traditional world-system or acculturation models these objects would signal foreign control or core dominance over a less developed neighbor. Instead, according to this new approach the way the recipient society perceives these foreign objects can differ greatly. The meaning, ideological content or roughly the value of an object is determined by the recipient’s cultural system, which itself is the sum of all participating social groups. How then can we determine the value of objects such as the Intercultural Style vessels?

3. Defining the “Intercultural style”

The “intercultural style” vessels offer a wide variety in typology and figurative and geometric decorations. Elements of these decorations and shapes can be recognized within the material culture of different civilizations ranging from the Indus to Mesopotamia, making this style interesting to study the intercultural connections within this area. In this thesis I limit myself to “Intercultural Style” soft stone vessels. Stone vessels only formed part of the Intercultural Style repertoire. On Tepe Yahya, Jiroft and many other sites ceramics have been found which share the characteristics of the Intercultural Style. Also textiles and murals may have been adorned with the Intercultural Style, but since these are fragile and perishable materials this remains speculation. Furthermore I limit myself to the “Serie Ancienne”. The ‘Serie Recente’, stylistically almost similar to the “Serie Ancienne, is a few hundred years younger and was mainly produced in the Gulf region.

3.1. Periodization

Period VI	4500-3800 BC
Period V A-C	3800-3400 BC
Period IV C	3400-3000 BC
Period IV B6-1	3000-2500 BC
Gap?	
Period IV A	2100-1800 BC
Gap?	
Period III	750-500 BC
Period II A&B	500 BC-200 AD
Period I A&B	200-700 AD

Table 1: Chronology of Tepe Yahya (Eda Vidali & Lamberg Karlovsky 1976: 237)

For the last few decades the dating of the main production and distribution period of the intercultural Style has been under much discussion. At the site of Tepe Yahya, one of the major production centers of the Intercultural Style, the start of production can be related to level IVB6 period, production peaked around level IVB1 and diminished again during levels IVA3 to IVA1 (Kohl 1986: 211, Lamberg-Karlovsky 1988: 48). How these levels relate to the Mesopotamian chronology has however been difficult to determine. In 1975 Kohl suggested level IVB1 coincides with part of the Early Dynastic period with a ‘midpoint’ of 2680 BC. The discontinuous, specific and unstable character of archaic trade and the uniformity of Intercultural Style motifs over time, led Kohl to believe the main production period must have been relatively short (Kohl 1975: 236-238). How long this period really extended is very difficult to determine. Since the Intercultural Style vessels were luxury goods of high value, their possible reuse, for instance as heirlooms, distorts the chronological picture. According

to Lamberg-Karlovsky, the Intercultural Style vessels have a long chronological span, roughly from Early Dynastic II to post-Akkadian times, a duration of some 500 years (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1988: 54). More recently, new radiocarbon evidence favors a younger date for the IVB1 level at Tepe Yahya, making it contemporary to the Akkadian or even Post-Akkadian period. This later dating of level IVB1 suggests a smoother transition to the IVA levels, including a quantitatively diminished but continuing Intercultural Style production. While the Intercultural Style objects found in Mesopotamia were largely thought to correlate to the late Early Dynastic period, a large number of these Mesopotamian examples are now, similar to the Tepe Yahya corpus, more likely to date to the Akkadian period. Even so, we cannot rule out the possibility that the Intercultural Style appeared slightly earlier in Mesopotamia than at Tepe Yahya. In Mari some vessels were found in a late Early Dynastic context which thus predates the start of production in Tepe Yahya (Kohl 2001: 220-221). Other earlier production centers which may explain this early material in Mari are as of yet undiscovered, but an origin in highland Iranian and distribution through Susa or directly to Mari seems to offer the best explanation. According to Aruz, the chronological bounderies of the manufacture, distribution and use of the Intercultural Style chlorite vessels, are now thought to lie between 2600 and 2000 BC (Aruz 2003: 244).

3.2. The 'Intercultural Style' corpus

In his doctoral thesis *"Seeds of Upheaval: The production of chlorite at Tepe Yahya and an analysis of commodity production and trade in Southwest Asia in the mid-third millennium."*, published in 1975, Philip Kohl provided a detailed description of the Intercultural Style corpus. He recognized some common elements in a wide variety of motives and vessel shapes/types, which distinguished them from later steatite styles. First he noted that the surface of the vessels was entirely covered with closely carved, detailed design associated with the Intercultural Style. Secondly he noted the absence of a firm base or ground line for vessels depicting figurative decorations. Thirdly he distinguished certain stylistic conventions such as horizontal bands near the rim and the base. Fourthly he recognized an effect of vitality and motion caused by patterning and an emphasis on curvilinear lines (Kohl 1975: 140-141). The assemblage found at Tepe Yahya, one of the few undisputed production-sites of the Intercultural style, both confirms these common elements, and shows exceptions to these elements, which according to Kohl, reflects the variety inherent to handcrafted work (Kohl 1975: 143).

Kohl recognized six major vessel forms in the Intercultural Style corpus. The most common form is a circular, flat-based vessel with a base and mouth of equal diameter (See fig. 3a and

fig. 4). There is much variation in the volume of these vessels, but some might have functioned as a drinking cup. The next form consists of vase-like tall vessels with inslanting, usually convex sides with a slightly smaller mouth aperture than base circumference (See fig. 3b and fig. 5). They were most likely used as containers for non-liquid material. The third form is globular storage jars (See fig. 3c and fig. 6). Again there is some variety in the shapes, but most common are large, flat-based globular jars with pronounced shoulders and everted rims. Their size, unwieldy nature and similarity to ceramic storage jars, indicates their main function was storage. The fourth form consists of plaques, which were probably used for decoration, since their shape does not allow these to be used as a container (See fig. 9c). The fifth type consists of basket-shaped solid stone objects, interpreted by Durrani as “stone ritual slabs with handles” (See fig. 3d and fig. 7), while Kohl thinks it is far more likely they were used as weights (Durrani 1964:88 in Kohl 1975: 206). Kohl described the last form as cornets, based on their thin, tapering shape. Although their function is unclear, they might have been used like a mantle-brooch or some other form of personal adornment (Kohl 1975: 202-209). Recent finds in Jiroft suggest a previously unknown seventh form, the stemmed cup (See fig. 3e and fig. 8), should be added to the corpus.

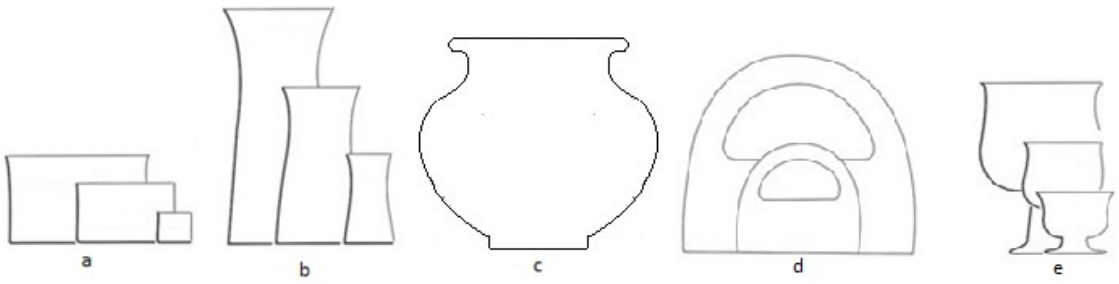

Figure 3: Five major ‘Intercultural Style’ vessel shapes (a. flat cup (b. vase (c. globular jar (d. ‘weights’ (e. stemmed cup (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 127)

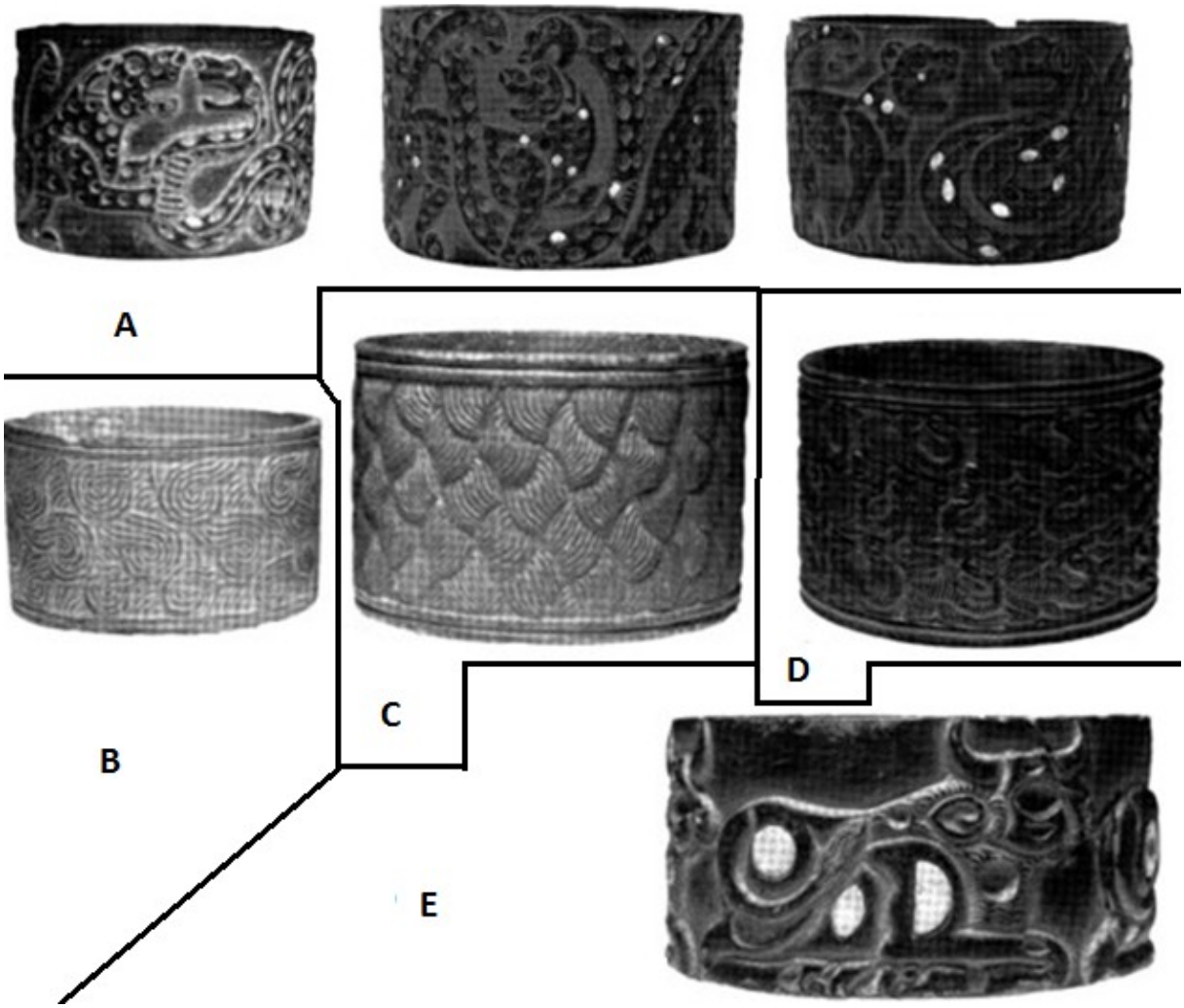

Figure 4: 'Intercultural Style' cups with figurative and geometric decorations (A. combatant snake motif (B. whirl motif (C. mat weave motif (D. scorpion motif (E. figured motif (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 127-128, 131)

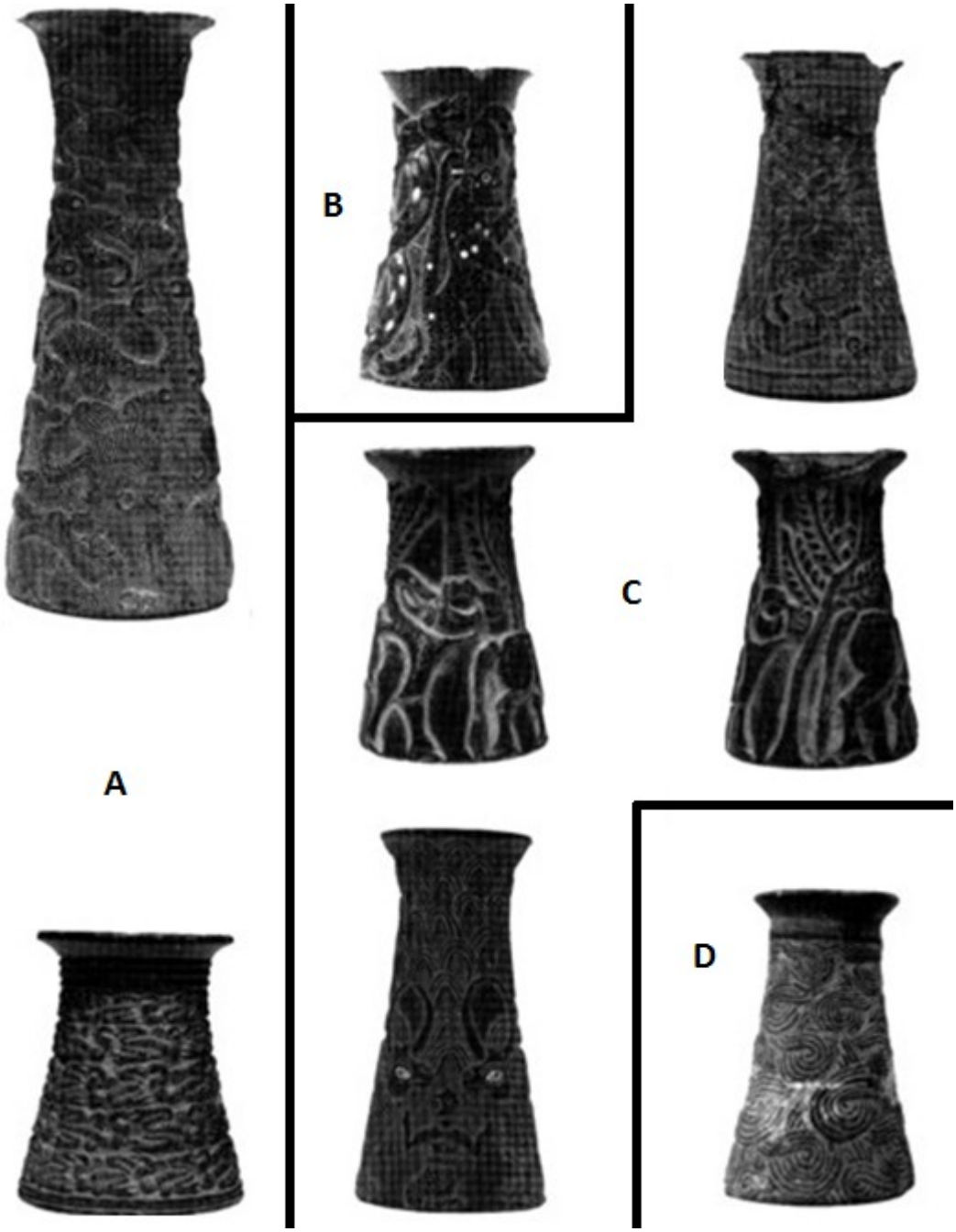

Figure 5: ‘Intercultural Style’ vases (A. scorpion motif (B. combatant snake motif (C. figured motif (D. Whirl motif (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 127-128, 131)

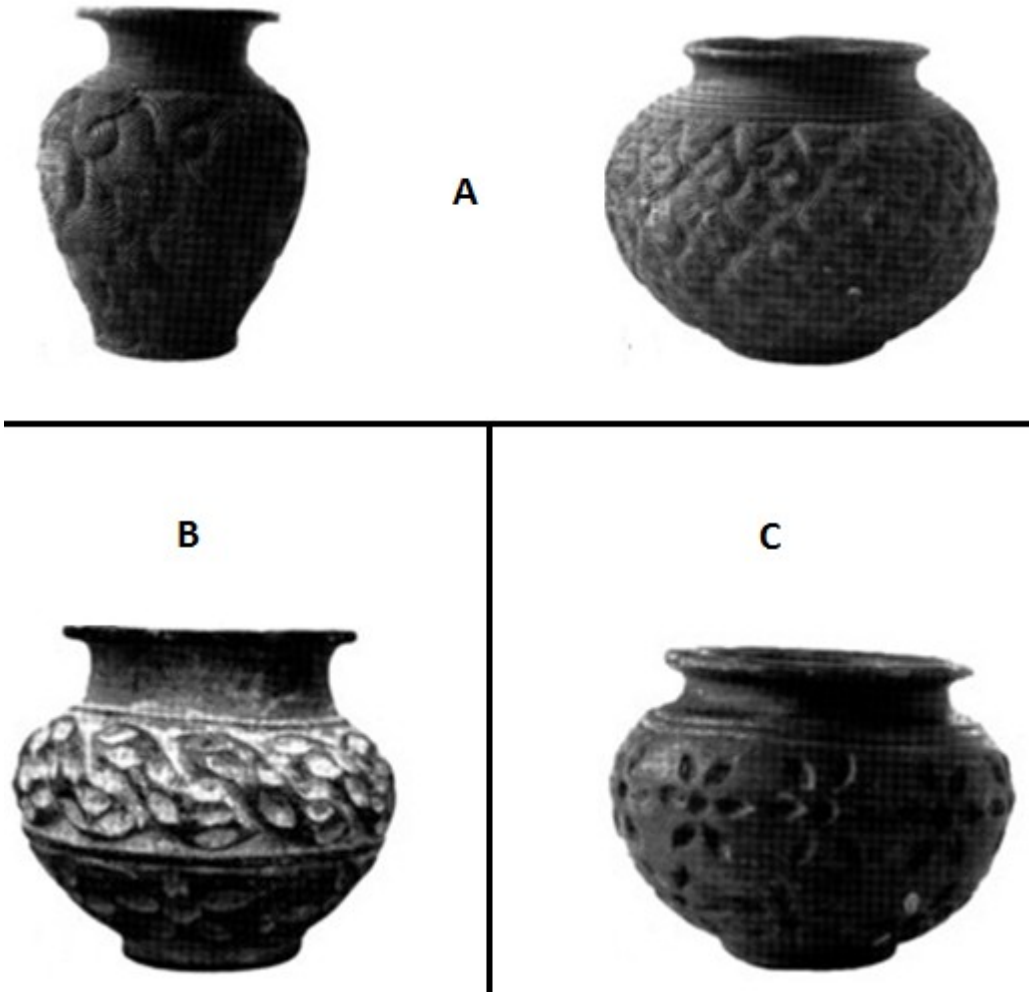

Figure 6: 'Intercultural Style' globular jars (A. whirl motif (B. combatant snake motif (C. rosette motif (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 131)

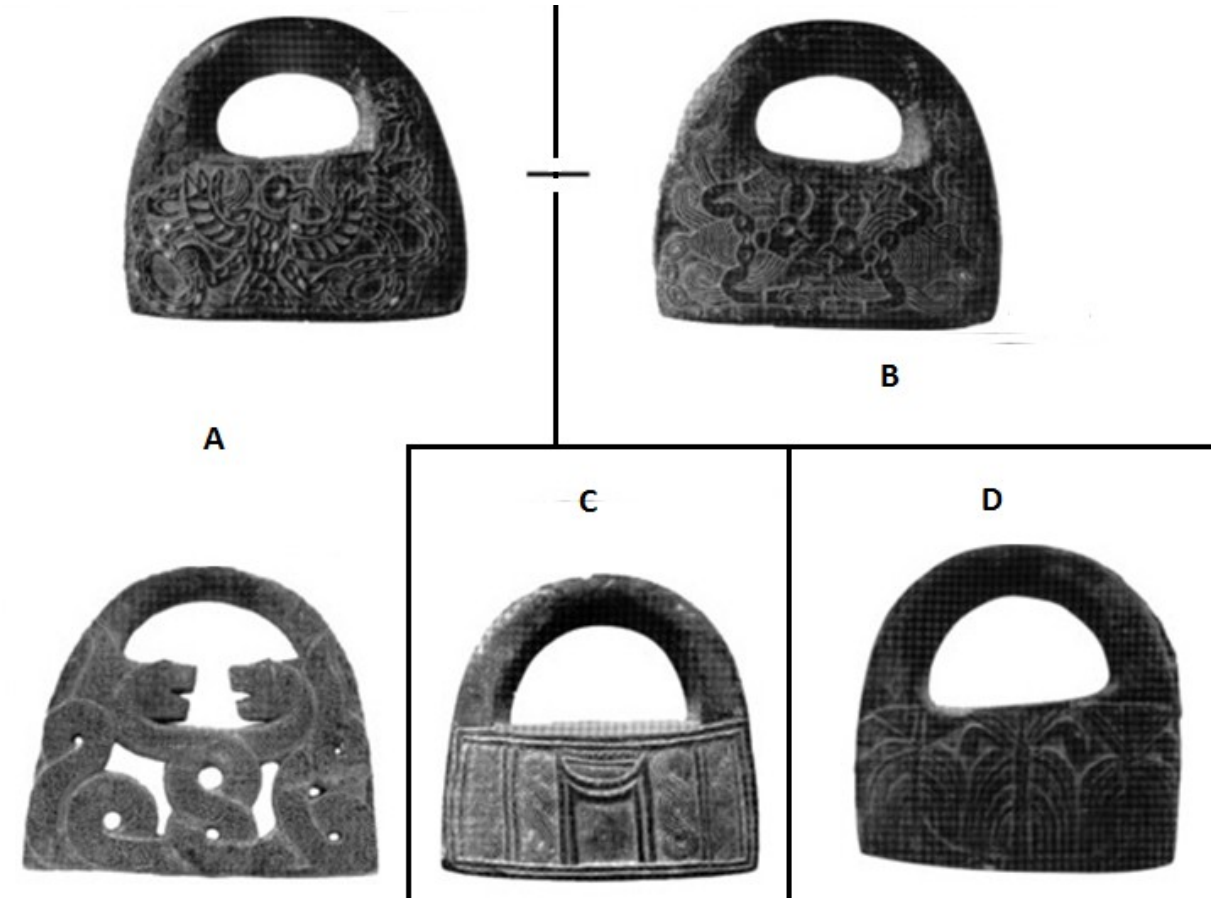

Figure 7: ‘Intercultural Style’ weights (A. combatant snake motif (B. figured motif (C. architectural motif D. date palm motif (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 128)

Figure 8: ‘Intercultural Style’ stemmed cups (A. figured motif (Madjidzadeh, Y & Perrot, J. 2005: 131)

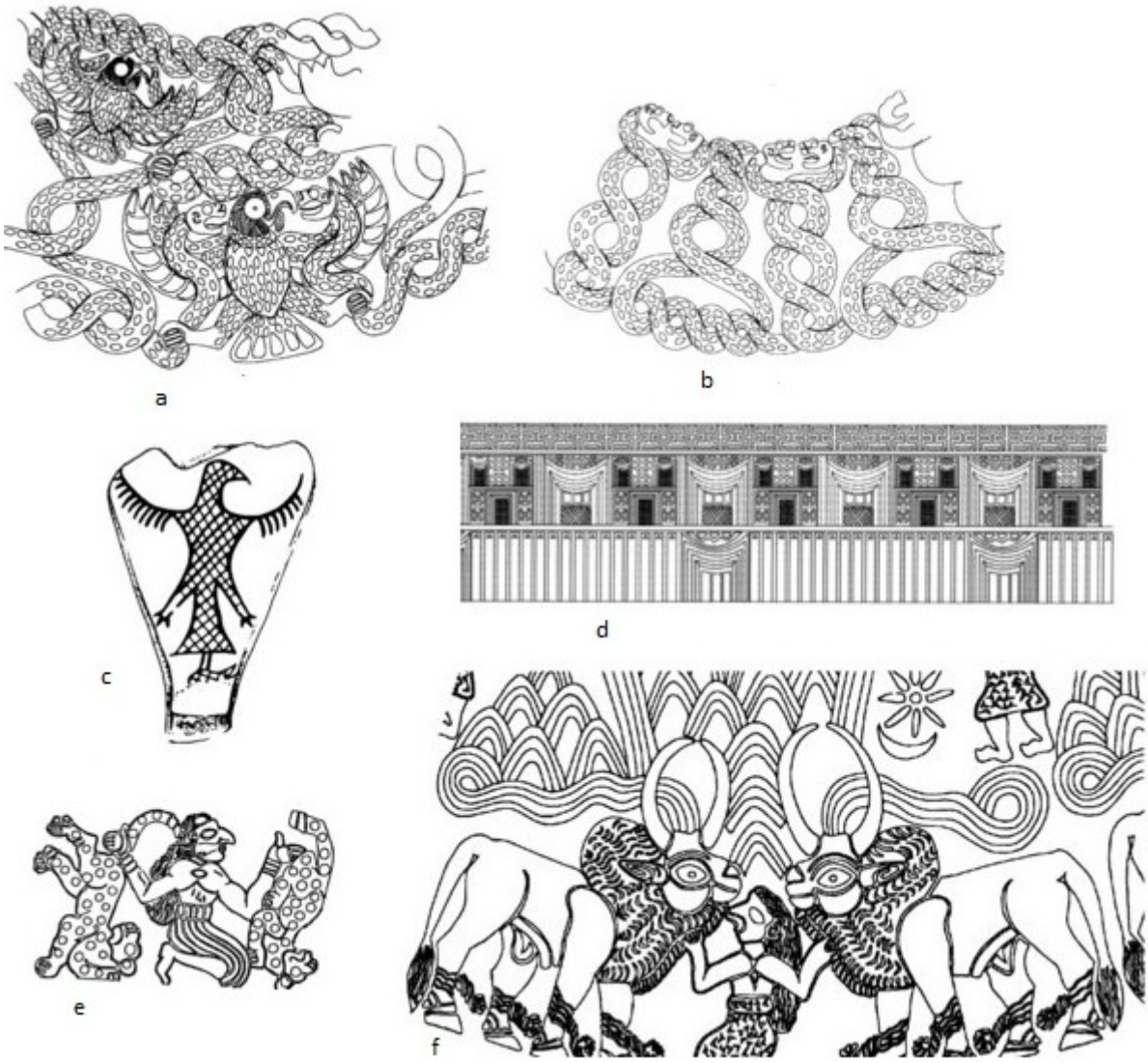

Figure 9: Some of the major figurative motives of the 'Intercultural Style' corpus (a. combatant eagle-snakes motif (b. combatant snakes motif (c. Imdugud design on ceremonial axe head (d. architectural motif (e. combatant man and snake motif (f. man and zebus decoration (Madjidzadeh, Y and Perrot, J. 2005: 139-151)

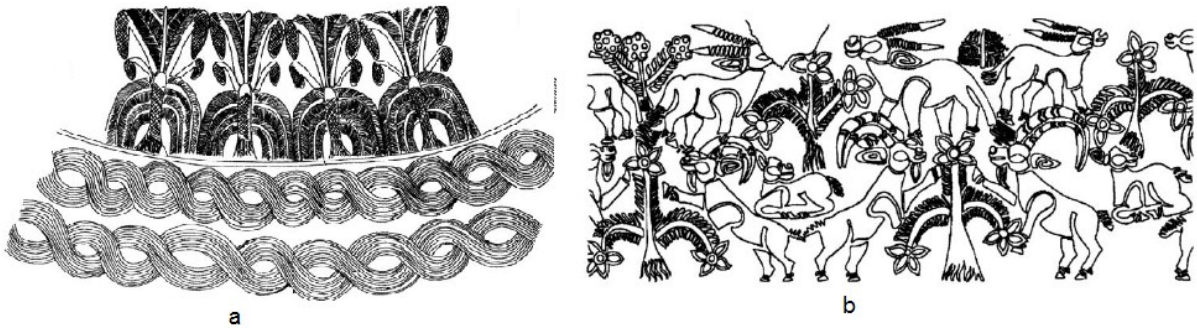

Figure 10: Some of the major figurative motives of the 'Intercultural Style' corpus (a. Date palm and whirl motif (b. figured motif (Madjidzadeh, Y and Perrot, J. 2005: 133)

3.3 The decorations of the ‘Intercultural Style

One of the most salient characteristics is the way the vessels were adorned. Although the Intercultural Style is not defined by its multitude of motifs, but rather by the elements previously described, there are some motifs which occur more frequently than others. Based on a comprehensive study of 274 vessels or fragments from twenty-eight separate sites, Kohl recognized twelve major motifs, often in combination with minor, or ‘space-filling’, designs. These twelve major motives depict either figurative or natural designs, or are of a more stylized geometric nature. In general the depictions are carved in low relief with elaborate patterns or inlaid surfaces (Kohl 1975: 147, Aruz 2003: 325).

The major figurative motifs are:

- Considered most impressive and one of the more common of the major figurative motifs is the combatant snakes motif (See fig. 4a, 5b, 6b, 7a, 9a and 9b). It depicts a snake, often combined with the characteristics of a lion, fighting another snake, or in some rare cases a feline or an eagle. Most famous example of this type is from Nippur. It was found in level VIIB of the Inanna temple, contemporaneous with level IVB in Tepe Yahya (Hansen and Dales 1962 in Kohl 1975: 150, Lamberg-Karlovsky 1988: 47). Inscribed on the vase was “Inanna and the Serpent” and although it is unclear if the vase was inscribed during its manufacture or later use, the place of discovery and the inscription both suggest a religious function. There is much variation in carving techniques, inlay, coloring and composition in this motif, which might suggest a wide chronological or geographical spread, but since all these different elements can be found on Tepe Yahya and are evenly distributed across the entire distribution zone of the Intercultural Style, this seems unlikely (Kohl 1975: 150-156).
- The second motif is less common than the combatant snakes and depicts date palms in duplicated rows or patterns (See fig. 7d and 10a). This design, often found on weights or plaques, has a high degree of uniformity. One weight found in Nippur was so similar to one found in Palmyra, that it might have been a direct imitation. Again, the function of these weights is unclear, although it might have had to do with the trade of dates, which were frequently imported into Mesopotamia (Saggs 1962: 266 in Kohl 1975:159, Kohl 1975: 157-162).
- The next major figurative design as recognized by Kohl is the scorpion motif (See fig. 4d), which, similar to the date palm motif, frequently appears in duplicated rows or patterns, often in combination with other major motifs. Another thing the design has in common with the date palms is the high degree of uniformity and possible imitation or

at least striking similarity. In the ancient Near East scorpions occupied an important place in omens and incantation texts, and its depiction might have carried certain sacred significance (Saggs 1962: 305-309 in Kohl 1975: 164, Kohl 1975: 162-164).

- Fourth is the figured motif and consists of some of the most striking examples of the Intercultural Style (See fig. 4e, 5c, 7b, 8a, 9e, 9f and 10b). Although low in quantity, only few of this type were found in Tepe Yahya, an overrepresentation in the Diyala Valley region suggest some (minor) local production. The figured style consists of human and animal, the humped bull, scorpion, lions and even anthropomorphic figures, and is unattached to a base line which caused the figures to appear moving freely on the surface of the vessel. The figured style seems to present on all vessel types and comes in a huge variety of inlay and cutting-techniques. More than any other motif, these figures support a notion of a shared intercultural iconography, or at least to a certain extent. Some fragments in the figured style show very complex low relief design involving human and animals with stylistic or iconographic elements from the entire distribution area of the Intercultural Style. One famous fragment from Khafayeh shows three complex scenes, involving an animal master controlling two snakes, a water master controlling the flow of twin streams of water and a lion and eagle devouring a cow. The two masters wear belted “net skirts”, comparable to Late Uruk priest-kings, while the closest parallels to their facial characteristics can be found in eastern Iran and western Central Asia. The snakes show similarities to different elements of examples from Mesopotamia, Iran, the Gulf and Uzbekistan. Another fragment from Khafayeh, found in the Sin Temple, shows a bull-man with hooved arms confronted by two lions on both sides, which is a common imagery in Mesopotamia (Aruz 2003: 245-330, Kohl 1975: 164-173).
- Even though only few examples have been found, the fifth figured motif is easily recognizable and has a very standardized design (See fig. 9c). The Imdugud, an anthropomorphic bird, often depicted on Sumerian art, is tied to a specific myth where Gilgamesh, in support of Inanna, kills Imdugud’s companion, a snake, after which Imdugud flees (Kohl 1975: 173-174). This seems to imply that the exchange system behind these vessels was specifically oriented to the Mesopotamian market, for instance to is temples. There was a shared set of iconographical expression of their beliefs or a cultural dominance of Mesopotamia over its eastern neighbors.
- The sixth motif features an odd mix between figurative and geometric elements. It is commonly called the hut or temple-facade motif (See fig. 7c and 9d), although the more neutral term architectural facade would be more appropriate. Closely followed by the combatant snake motif, the hut motif was the most used figurative design, again often in combination with other motifs (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1988: 51). The most prominent design within the motif presumably represents a monumental building

(Lamberg-Karlovsky 1972: 92 in Kohl 1975: 178), often shown in combination with side designs such as zigzag lines which might represent a stepped structure, and space-filling geometric patterns. Precise interpretation of the motif seems impossible, but the uniformity of the central design marks it as a highly stylized symbol which was recognizable throughout Southwest Asia and supports the notion of an intercultural shared meaning. The central design may represent an actual monumental building known throughout Southwest Asia, such as the temple of the 'sacred' city of Nippur, or it may reflect an intercultural similarity in formal building techniques (Lamberg-Karlovsky in Kohl 1981: 391). Analytical data suggest multiple production centers of the hut motif, some with the high standards of craftsmanship associated with the Intercultural Style, while others produced cruder designs, which can be interpreted as imitations (Kohl 1970: 20-21, Kohl 1975: 177-182).

In addition to these figurative designs several geometric motifs occur:

- The most common of these motifs is the beveled square. On its own, this motive can cover the entire surface of a vessel; its function purely decorative. In combination with other motifs, especially the hut motif, the beveled square's brick-like appearance can accentuate or symbolize certain architectural elements. In Mesopotamia, Mari, Susa, Malyan and Tepe Yahya the beveled square motif appears with very high frequency and in many combinations with other motifs (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1988: 51, Kohl 1975: 196-198).
- The mat or basket-weave is the second most common motif (See fig. 4c). While relatively rare in Mesopotamia, it occurs frequently in Iran. The motif is universally accepted to represent basketry or wickerwork (Piggot 1950: 118-119, Delougaz 1960: 91 and Porada 1971: 323 in Kohl 1975: 187). It is unknown if the motif has any symbolical significance. Some have suggested it represented wool and thus implied the trade of cloth, while others believed the motif to represent waves or leaves (Kohl 1975: 188-189).
- The imbricate motif consists of overlapping semicircles, which, similar to the beveled square motif, often covers the entire vessel. The design seems to resemble scales of fishes or reptiles, but some think the design represents mountains and can thus signify a locus of production in the highlands of the Zagros range (Herz 1966: 32 in Kohl 1974: 192, Kohl 1975: 190-193).
- The fourth geometric motif is the guilloche or intertwined coil. The design might represent the stylization of the combatant snake motif (Parrot 1956: 175 in Kohl 1975: 175). Although in some cases the guilloche is the only motif on a vessel, in most cases it appears as a secondary design, decorating and filling the surface around a

main motif. The focus of this motif's distribution seems to be in Mesopotamia (Kohl 1975: 175-177).

- The exact nature of the fifth geometric motif, the whirl (see fig. 4b, 5d, 6a and 10a), is unclear. Some archaeologists (Contenau 1927 in Kohl 1975: 194) have suggested the design followed the Sumerian convention for depicting waves, while others (Kohl 1975:194) state the whirl motif resembles a beard. Another option is that the whirl is simply a variation on the guilloche motif (Herz 1966 in Kohl 1975: 194). The complex design and heavy inlay in combination with its scarcity compared to other Intercultural Style motifs might indicate this design was more labor-intensive and thus more expensive than others (Kohl 1975: 196).
- The last geometric design, the rosette (See fig. 6c), is extremely rare. In a few cases the design was the main motif on a vessel, while it appears on some figured vessels as a side motif. Its function remains unclear (Kohl 1975: 174-175).

According to Lamberg-Karlovsky, excavator of Tepe Yahya between 1967 and 1975, the various animal/figurative motifs and the hut motif are of primary iconographic significance, while the other motifs were used for decoration or to emphasize certain elements of the primary motif. The specific meaning of the figurative motifs remains unknown, largely due to a lack of textual evidence. The context in which the Intercultural Style fragments were found might tell us something though. Many fragments were found in burial contexts, which may indicate that the symbolic value or meaning of the vessels incorporate attitudes and beliefs concerning death. Although fewer in number, the fragments found in temple context probably possess some sort of religious significance (Lamberg-Karlovsky1988:52). Aruz states that the Intercultural Style integrates iconographic elements derived from both the Near Eastern and Harappan (Indus-valley) traditions. Typical Harappan elements are the short-horned bull and horned zebu, both part of the 'figurative' motif (Aruz 2003:330-331). Since these animals did not exist in Iran or the Near East, Harappan origin or inspiration for these decorations seems likely. Near Eastern elements are for example, the Imdugud which is connected to the Gilgamesh-epos and the whirl motif, either in the way Sumerian artists depicted waves or beards (Kohl 1975:194).

4. The intercultural context of stone vessel circulation

This chapter contains a brief description of the political, social and economic developments in South and West Asia around the 25th century BC in order to get a clear understanding of the context in which the 'Intercultural Style' vessels circulated. During the third millennium BC, trade networks started to intensify, connecting the different cultures within South and West Asia. Within Mesopotamia and the Indus civilization urbanization gave rise to more complex socio-political and religious structures, which increasingly demanded both raw resources and finished luxury goods. As the amount of goods traded along these networks increased, trade hubs on key junctions emerged. The production and distribution of the "Intercultural Style" stone vessels took place in the middle of these developments, and can been seen both as a result, but also as one of the contributing factors to these developments.

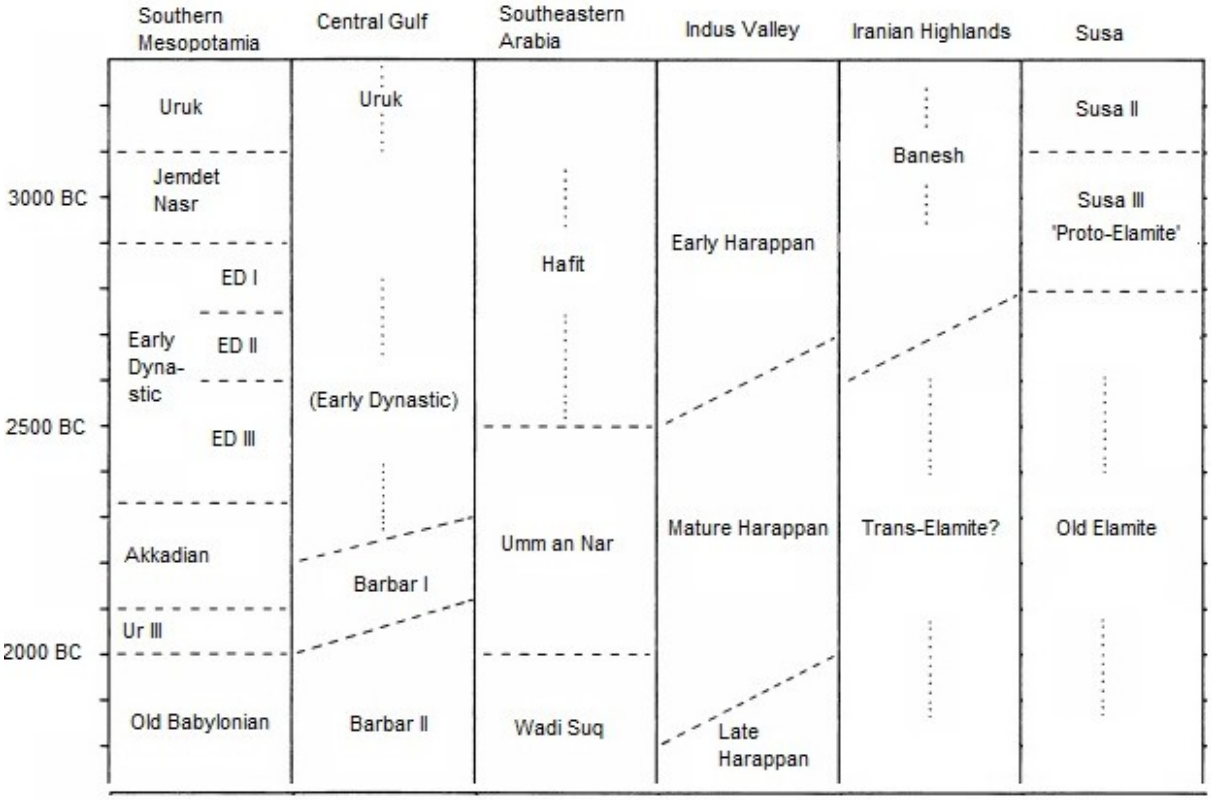

Table 2: Relative chronologies of south-west Asia during the Bronze Age (Edens 1992:120, Potts, D.T. 1999: 84, 127)

4.1 Southern Mesopotamia

The long Early Dynastic period began after the demise of the Uruk civilization at the end of the 4th millennium BC and the brief Jemdet Nasr period and ended with the rise of Akkad under the rule of Sargon in 2350 BC (Postgate 1992: 38). While in much of northern and western Mesopotamia the decline of Uruk influence left a cultural vacuum, in southern Mesopotamia there was a cultural continuity (Foster & Foster 2009: 35). Early evidence from

Jemdet Nasr led Foster & Foster to conclude that Southern Mesopotamian city-states formed a cultural community, tied through language, religious institutions and political leagues or federations. Written records from Ur, several centuries later than Jemdet Nasr, seem to confirm this interpretation (Foster & Foster 2009: 36). Ur showed an agricultural system of similar sized parcels of land managed by individual cultivators and overseers, a system typical for most city-states in southern Mesopotamia during the 3th millennium BC. Another important find in Ur were its Royal Graves. These burials appeared to be extremely rich in burial goods, human and animal sacrifices. Both the goods and the sacrifices expressed the great status and prestige the kings already acquired during the third millennium. The burial goods themselves attest wide spread exchange networks since many of the goods were imported from Iran, Afghanistan, India, the Arabian Gulf and Asia Minor (Leick 2001: 112). While Ur can be called exceptional in its wealth, it is likely the many cities of Southern Mesopotamia tried to walk a similar path. This created fierce military, religious and economic competition between the city states (Foster & Foster 2009: 40). While internal strife was abundant a sense of unity must have persisted through a similar language, religion and material culture.

In the northern periphery of the Mesopotamian city-states like Mari became very powerful controlling the trade along the Euphrate. Assur served a similar function controlling the trade along the Tigris and some strategic passes in the Zagros mountains. In the south-east Susa, an important city which developed autonomously from the Mesopotamian cities became an important junction of trade going between Mesopotamia and Iran and beyond (Postgate 1992: 7).

4.2 Susa, Khuzestan and the Iranian highlands

The plains of Khuzestan formed an isolated niche, close to but separated from southern Mesopotamia by extensive marshlands on one side and hemmed in on the other sides by the Zagros Mountains and the Arabian Gulf. Its main urban center was Susa. The pre-Uruk layers of Susa I show a distinctive independent development from its Mesopotamian neighbors. During the Uruk period however Susa II appears to have been heavily influenced (Amiet in Potts, D.T. 1999: 56) or even outright colonized by the Uruk culture (Algaze in Potts, D.T. 1999: 56). Tablets found in the Susa III layers (early third millennium BC) show ‘functional’ similarities to ones found in southern Mesopotamia, but are stylistically distinctive, which, according to Potts, suggests the Khuzestan plain was influenced but never politically dominated by an Mesopotamian administration (Potts, D.T. 1999: 65, table 3.2).

The vast area between the Harappan en Mesopotamian civilizations, which nowadays encompasses Iranian highlands and Afghanistan, has been interpreted as part of the periphery of either core. An initial absence of great cultural, religious and urban centers in the archaeological record seemed to confirm this interpretation. Accordingly Wallerstein's world-system model appeared highly applicable to the interregional balance. Last few decades, however, emerging archaeological research in the region has disproved this notion. Although no third millennium urban centers (with the possible exception of Jiroft) in scale comparable to the Mesopotamian or Harappan centers have been found, there are strong indications for the independent development of multiple southern central Asian cultures. The earliest identifiable cultures were Elam and Awan. The geographical predecessors of Elam, the Proto-Elamites, extended over parts of Fars and Khuzestan provinces of southwestern Iran and exerted considerable influence over remote areas of the Iranian Plateau (Alden 1982, Lamberg-Karlovsky 1996). Archaic texts from Uruk may refer to this Proto-Elamite state as early as 3000 BC and both Elam and Awan are indisputably referred to in the mid-third millennium Sumerian King List, which mentions these two cultures as follows: *Col. ii 35-7: Enmebaragasi of Kish attacked Elam, Col. iv 5-6: Ur was attacked and its kingship carried to Awan, Col. iv 17-19: Awan was attacked and its kingship carried to Kish.* (Potts 1991:85, Jacobsen 1939 in Potts 1991:87). From 3000 to 2300 BC, the major part of Khuzestan and the Iranian highlands was independent of Mesopotamian political influence. Even so hostilities between both did occur as the Sumerian King List attests. Economic texts from Lagash dating between 2600-2400 BC indicate the submission of some areas, but these appear to have been temporary. Nothing suggests that continued political influence was wielded by a Mesopotamian state over its eastern neighbors (Potts 1999:101). Around 2300 BC, the end of the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic period, the balance of power changed. After Sargon of Akkad united northern and southern Mesopotamia into the Akkadian empire, he conquered Susa and undertook wide-ranging military campaigns against Elam, Awan, and other cultural entities further east.

P. Amiet introduced the term 'Trans-Elamite' to summarize the similarities within the material culture of the different sites of the Iranian highlands into one cultural identity. He focused on the "Intercultural Style" vessels as the most visible testimony of this cultural identity. According to him the center of this early phase of 'Trans-Elamite' culture would be Kerman province, most notably at sites such as Tepe Yahya and Shahdad. The 'Trans-Elamite' culture-group as a whole may have encompassed western Baluchistan as well; the Intercultural Style stone vessels were only part of a shared manifestation of artistic originality as for example expressed in painted pottery (Amiet in Potts 1999: 98). Potts however argues that the similarities in material culture throughout Iran merely reflect sets of parallels between

the different cultures. In this sense the term ‘Trans-Elamite’ doesn’t refer to a single cultural identity but to an incoherent ‘community of cultures’ (Potts, D.T. 1999: 100).

4.3 The Indus valley

The Harappan civilization developed during the second half of the third millennium BC in some ways comparable to the main processes in Mesopotamia during the Uruk period. Rapid urbanization along the Indus river incited colonization of large, adjacent tracts of land. Control over local rare resources and long-distance exchange was achieved through the creation of outposts at often far away locations. At the same time a highly standardized material culture emerged, produced in specialized industrial settlements, while other settlements showed agrarian or residential specialization. The associated quantitative increase in local trade can partly explain the emergence of an elaborate writing system.

Bigger settlements such as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa show, in contrast to the smaller specialized settlements, much evidence for internal differentiation with segregated residential and industrial city quarters laid out along a master grid plan, which indicates a strong centralized administration with the ability to mobilize a substantial labor force. In order to serve its commercial interests both locally and abroad, outposts were founded throughout the Harappan core and periphery. Algaze distinguished three different types of outposts, based on size, location and function. The thing these outposts had in common is that through them the Harappan elite sought to control resources and trading routes in a large area around the Indus valley. Some outposts, easily recognizable through their typical Harappan material culture, were found far into Afghanistan and Baluchistan, as far away as 700 km from the nearest Harappan settlement. Of special interest is a serie of coastal Mature Harappan outposts in southern Pakistan. While these sites exerted control over local resources they may have served as important links in the emerging maritime trade with southwestern Iran, the Persian Gulf and southern Mesopotamia. Further Harappan outposts may have existed on the Saudi Peninsula near important copper sources. Overall, these outposts signify the extensiveness of intercultural contact, both over land through northern Afghanistan and Baluchistan with the Hilmand civilization and farther north Bactria, and over sea through the Arabian Gulf and beyond to Mesopotamia (Winckelman 2000: 43). Exchange involved the nearby periphery directly tied to the need of the growing urban centers, but also the long distance bidirectional exchange associated with a broad international market. The main resources the Harappan civilization imported were copper, tin, timber, shells and exotic stones. Part of these imports ended up in export oriented workshops and traded with Mesopotamia for their finished goods (Algaze 1993:312-316, Possehl 1997, 2002).

4.4 Patterns of trade during the mid-third millennium

During the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic I periods there was a decline of long distance trade between Mesopotamia and the east compared to the preceding Uruk period (See fig. 11). The import in lapis lazuli even ceded alltogether, possibly due to the proto-Elamite culture controlling all trade in the western Iranian highlands. In the eastern Iranian highlands the Helmand civilization rose to prominence, trading with central Asian cultures and the early Harappan culture (Kohl 1975: 370-372).

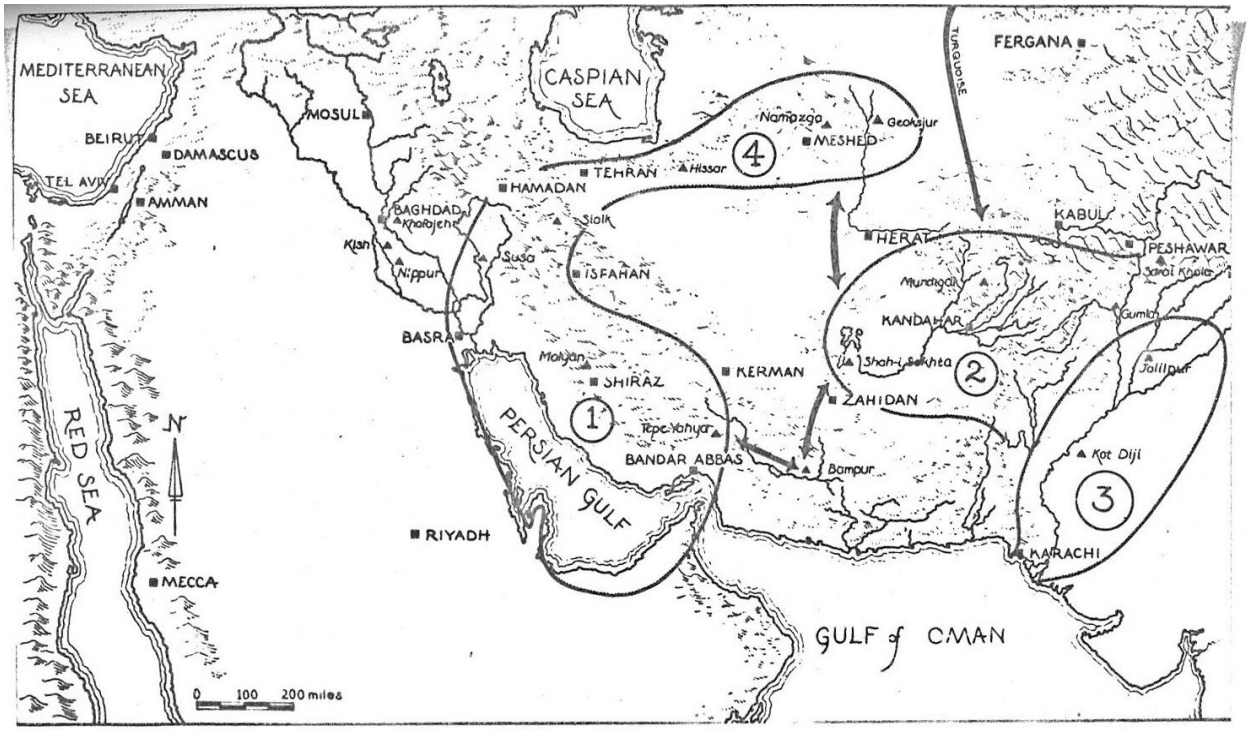

Figure 11: Trade patterns during the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic I periods, numbers showing major interaction spheres and arrows major trade routes (Kohl 1975: 375)

The Early Dynastic II and IIIa periods saw the Harappan and Turkmenistan civilizations starting to develop fully and trade between them and the many intermediate Afghan cultures, like the Hilmund culture (Winckelman 2000:43), was established (See fig. 12). In the Persian gulf over-sea trade developed, focussing on Tarut as an important center for the

transhipment of finished as well as unfinished goods. This period also knew a revival of the overland trade in gold and lapis lazuli between Mesopotamia and the east. The distribution of ‘Intercultural Style’ objects during this period suggests two dinstinctively different interaction spheres, one connecting Tepe Yahya, Mari and Susa, the other Southern Mesopotamia, Tarut and possibly Bampur (Kohl 1975: 376-377). Huge quantities of ‘Intercultural Style’ objects found on Tarut and the Failaka Islands emphasize the importance of the Arabian Gulf as a major supply channel for southern Mesopotamia (Potts, T.F. 1989: 139).

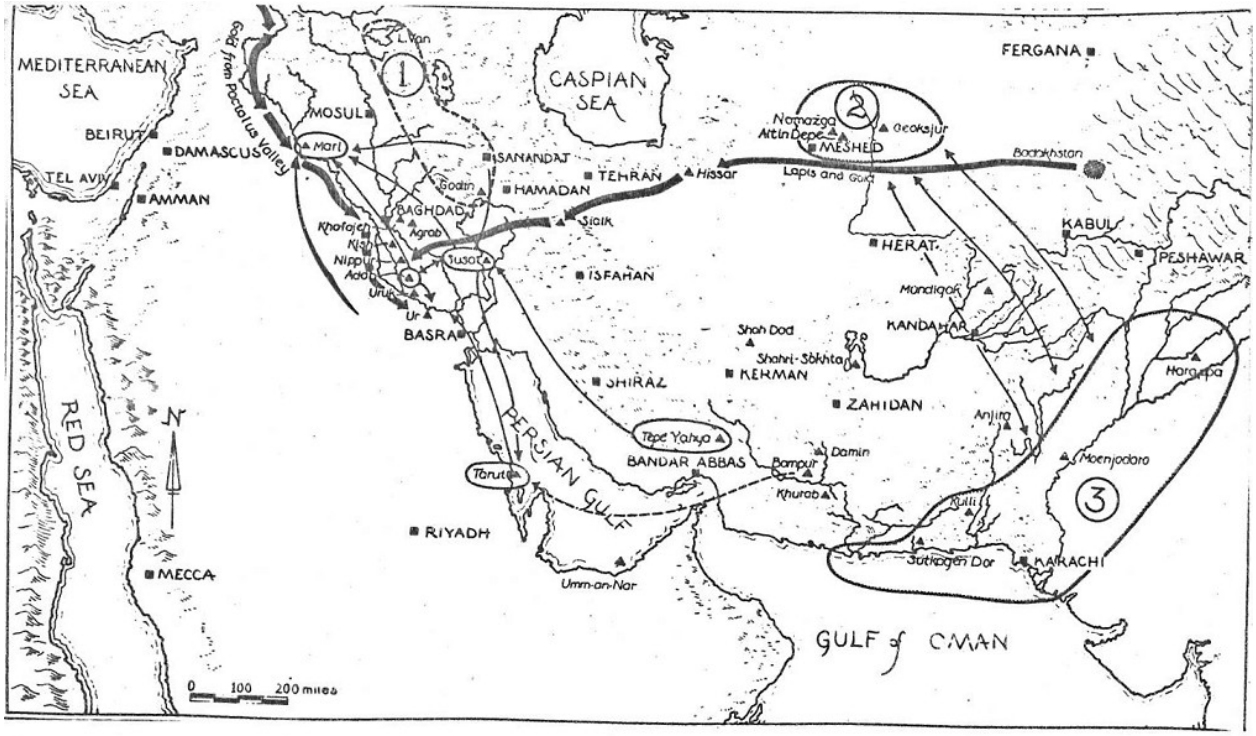

Figure 12: Trade patterns during the Early Dynastic II & IIIa periods, numbers showing major interaction spheres and arrows major trade routes (Kohl 1975: 378)

During the Early Dynastic IIIb and Early Akkadian period there were to important shifts in trade routes (See fig. 13). First, sea-based trade route along the Persian Gulf generally increased in importance and expanded directly to the Harappan civilization, at the cost of the south Iranian cities. As a result Tepe Yahya, Malyan and many other sites along the former overland routes were abandoned. The second shift was in the trade route between the

Mature Harappan and the Turkmenistan civilization. This route shifted north, excluding the Afghan settlements from its profitable trade, which led decline and depopulation in this region (Kohl 1975: 379-383).

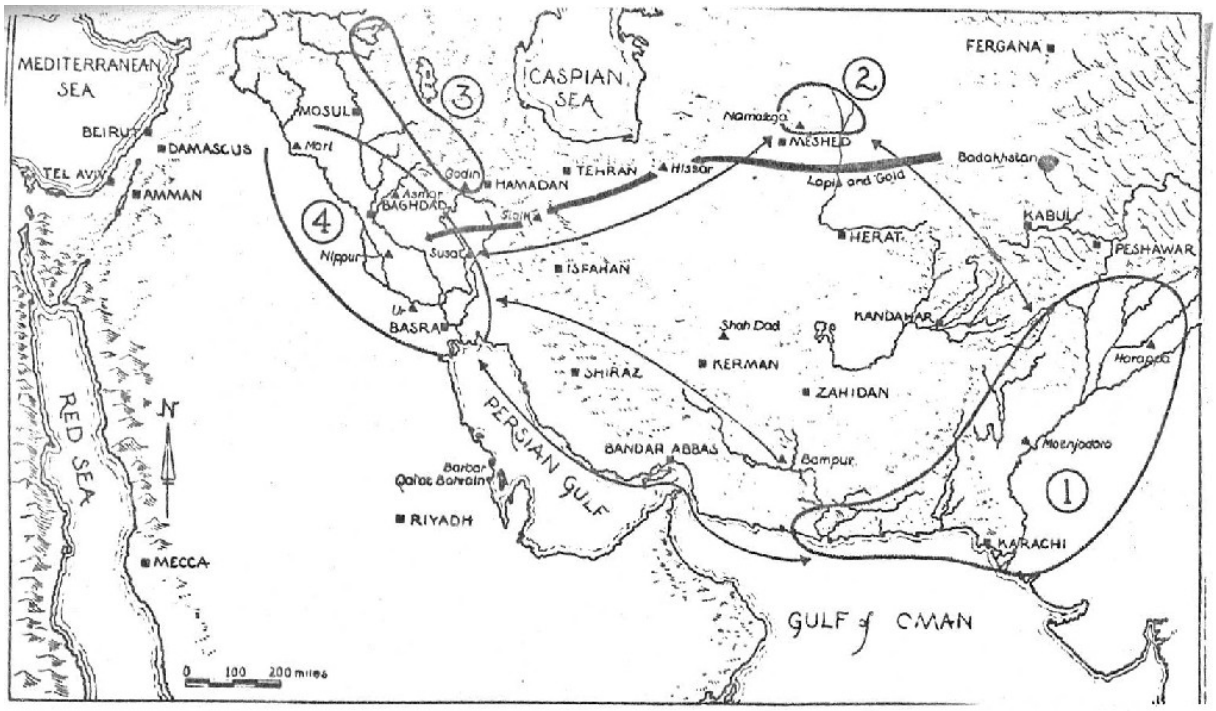

Figure 13: Trade patterns during the Early Dynastic IIIb and Early Akkadian periods, numbers showing major interaction spheres and arrows major trade routes (Kohl 1975: 381)

The nature of the trade during the third millennium has been under considerable debate for the last few decades. Trade during the early dynastic period has always been interpreted as socially or religiously motivated, whereas during the second part of the third millennium the nature of trade is often seen as becoming more commercially orientated (Kohl 1974: 444-457 in Kohl 2001: 210). Although social and religious motivated trade is plausible, the evidence for the absence of a commercially motivated trade during the first half of the third millennium is simply not there, which means we cannot rule out the possibility that commercial trade already began during the Early Dynastic period (Kohl 2001: 210).

5. Value and exchange

The previous chapters have provided a theoretical framework on intercultural connections, a detailed description of the 'Intercultural Style' corpus and its production and distribution and a

brief description of the cultural context in which the 'Intercultural Style' object were exchanged. This chapter both provides a theoretical background on the exchange and value of objects and a more interpretative discussion on the distribution, production, exchange and value of 'Intercultural Style' vessels.

5.1. The value of objects

In order to understand the impact or implications of the presence of foreign material culture, the value of these objects must be analyzed. By value I mean the amount of energy the importing party is willing to expend to acquire an object. Energy may translate directly to the energy required to produce something to trade for the desired object, but also indirectly in for example the energy required for transport of the object or more extreme, the mounting of a military operation to acquire the object. In order to understand how much energy the importing party is willing to expend to acquire the object, its value must be determined. The value of objects is rarely fixed, but instead culturally determined, which means that different societies or even groups within these societies can value the same object differently. Object value itself can be based on many different things, to name but a few: labor cost, use value, exchange value, social value, moral value, religious value or sentimental value (Bevan 2007:9). Following, there is a multitude of approaches on how the value of objects can be determined. The most notable theoretical approaches deduce the value of an object based on the objects relation to its production process, its underlying exchange mechanisms and the manner of its consumption. Even though foreign material generally represents only a fraction of a society's total material assemblage, we may assume these foreign objects often have a high value since people went through the trouble of importing them over often great distances. In the absence of more efficient methods of transportation, foreign objects obtained through trade or plunder, had to be physically carried back home, increasing their perceived value (Bevan 2007:9). A final important aspect to consider is how the value of an object in not fixed in time and space (Kopytoff 1986); Different cultures, social groups or individuals can appreciate the same object differently and this appreciation can change through time. The inherent object value is in this sense overshadowed by its wider social context.

5.2 Mode of exchange

	Forced Exchange	**Voluntary Exchange**
Objects moving with owners	e.g. the possessions of slaves, captives, refugees	e.g. the possessions of mercenaries, emissaries, administrators, travelling

		craftspeople, marriage partners
Objects moving between people	e.g. plunder, tribute	e.g. gifts, commercial trade and associated phenomena

Table 3: Summary of possibilities on the movement of objects (Bevan 2009: 22).

In his book *'Stone vessels and values in the bronze age Mediterranean'* Bevan recognizes two basic distinctions that characterize the movement of objects (Bevan 2009: 21). The first is if the object moved with its original owner or if the object is moved by intermediaries such as traders. Objects moving with their owner potentially retain much of their cultural baggage, while objects which move with an intermediary might lose some to all of their original meaning (Renfrew 1993 in Bevan 2009: 22). The second distinction Bevan makes is if the object exchange is voluntary or forced. This distinction is interesting because it tells us something about the underlying dynamics of power between both parties and individuals. Both tribute and plunder imply dominance over a lesser party and an unequal unidirectional exchange. Gift-exchange and commercial trade however work on an equal level of reciprocity or through the exchange of proportionately valued objects.

An important issue concerning trade-goods is who organized its exchange or production. The organization might be top-down, e.g. a religious or political elite concerned with redistribution or the (long-distance) exchange of luxury products and materials. This exchange would be motivated as a means of expressing power and control over producer and consumer, whether locals or competing elites. Bottom-up organization by local impromptu initiative, e.g. kin-based groups, big chiefs, traders or cultural subgroups, is motivated differently. Self-sufficiency, profit or the acquirement of necessary foodstuffs might encourage bottom-up initiative.

5.3 The production and distribution of "Intercultural Style" vessels

So far, two entirely separate sites have been recognized, where, along with unfinished pieces, the full range and characteristics of the Intercultural Style was encountered. Excavations in Tepe Yahya, a site in Southeastern Iran in the Zagros mountains, by Lamberg-Karlovsky revealed the site as a major production center for chlorite ware. Chlorite was locally available and was both traded as raw resource and finished good. The other major site was some seven hundred kilometers to the west on the island of Tarut. Construction work uncovered huge quantities of Intercultural Style fragments in what is interpreted as stone-lined cist graves. In her extensive work *"Art of the first cities: The third millennium BC from the Mediterranean to the Indus"*, Joan Aruz suggests that because some objects from Tarut were only partially formed or appear to have been recut and because

unworked pieces of chlorite were also uncovered, raw chlorite must have been available locally and Tarut acted as a center for production, completion and transshipment of the Intercultural Style (Aruz 2003:325). Although local availability of chlorite and thus local production can be called into question and the burial context of the bigger part of the uncovered Intercultural Style objects would not exactly suggests the presence of transshipment, such high numbers of objects does position Tarut in the center of a more widespread exchange network for Intercultural Style objects, or at least emphasizes the importance of the Arabian Gulf as a major supply channel for southern Mesopotamia (Potts, T.F. 1989: 139).

Number of Vessels Location/Style	'Serie Ancienne' / 'Intercultural Style'	'Serie Recente'
Mesopotamia/Sumer	131	15
Iran/Elam	173	17
Gulf/Dilmun	255	88
Oman/Makkan	3	275
Indus Valley/Harappan	2	2
Unknown context	24	1
Total	588	398

Table 4: The Distribution of the 'Intercultural Style'/Serie Ancienne' and 'Serie Recente' in the Near East during the third millennium BC (David 1995:31).

Another important production or distribution site seems to have been Jiroft. Discovered in 2003, little is yet published of Jiroft, but the first impression of lead-excavator Youssef Madjidzadeh has of Jiroft positions the site at the center of what he calls the 'Jiroft civilization', which could include sites such as Tepe Yahya, Malyan and Shahr-i-Sokhta. Huge numbers of chlorite, decorated vessels have been discovered in Jiroft, either during the excavation project or by local looters. Although all the looted objects are difficult to date without stratigraphic context, they are very similar, both in shape and decoration, to the Intercultural Style (Lawler 2003:973-974).

With the possible exception of Jiroft, Tepe Yahya is the only place found so far where the entire manufacturing process of the vessels can be traced, from rough cut stone from the local mines to the export of finished products. This does not mean however that Tepe Yahya was the only production place. Based on stylistic analysis of the great variety of vessel shapes, motifs and quality other specialized production sites can be expected. In the Zagros mountains there was plenty of chlorite available for local production or export of uncut

chlorite to manufacturing centers in the Mesopotamian cities. Even so, purely on stylistic grounds it is impossible to say anything conclusive (Kohl 1975:273-274).[1]

Based on diffraction and chemical analysis of 109 Intercultural Style fragments from, Kohl postulated five different source areas for the chlorite used for their production. The first source area was in West or Central Saudi Arabia. The raw chlorite was then taken overland to Tarut, where it was worked into the Intercultural Style vessels and traded with the Mesopotamian urban centers. Another direct source of chlorite, independent of Susa and the Iranian highlands, was the far eastern Iranian site of Tepe Bampur. Since only a small amount of 'true' Intercultural Style fragments have been uncovered in Tepe Bampur, and chlorite was readily available, direct sea-trade of raw chlorite between Tepe Bampur and Tarut or Mesopotamia might have been possible. The chlorite used in Tepe Yahya came from local sources and was probably only traded as finished products. As the fragments found in Susa and Mari show the strongest correspondence to this group, it is likely that direct overland trade routes existed from Tepe Yahya through Malyan to Susa, and from there onwards. The fourth chlorite source is in the Western Zagros near the Diyala valley and probably served Mari and Susa directly but if production took place near the source or in Mari and Susa is unclear. The location of the fifth source of chlorite remains unknown. Centered on Susa, the chlorite may have come from the Western Zagros, but a source in Western Oman is also possible. Although evidence for these trade routes and source areas is circumstantial due to a lack of archaeological and geological data, it shows that there must have been multiple production centers, carving elaborate, iconographically identical designs on high valued vessels destined for long distance export (Kohl 1975:318-327, Kohl 2001:220).

The distribution of the Intercultural Style vessels themselves ranges across several cultural areas in Southwest Asia, but was largely centered on the major urban sites in Mesopotamia, Khuzestan, Tarut and Tepe Yahya (Kohl 1975:273, Potts, T.F. 1993:389). Even though both quantity and manner of exchange differed greatly throughout the entire area, quality, motif and vessel shape and arguably iconographic meaning were identical. Even so certain vessel shapes and motifs proved more popular or valuable in specific regions. We should

1 An interesting contemporary development has taken place last decade in southern Iran near the ancient site of Jiroft. Jiroft has been plundered extensively, especially Intercultural Style objects were well sought after, and since local communities have started producing Intercultural Style objects, some near copies of originals while others sported new figurative styles. Since the chlorite sources they used were the same as those used for the original vessels, it proves extremely difficult to discern fake from original. Since the archaeological record has been 'poluted' by these fakes and in the absence of proper publication on Jiroft, I do not use any recent data on Jiroft in this thesis.

differentiate between objects which ended up somewhere on purpose or by ‘accident’. The most North-Eastern Intercultural Style vessel was found in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan. It is however a completely unique find; in Uzbekistan and neighboring Bactria and Merghana it represents the only Intercultural Style vessel found and is thus unlikely to be part of a Central Asian exchange network (Kohl 2001:255). Even so even a unique find like this illustrates the extensiveness of mid-third millennium cultural connections (Kohl 1975:207). In Mesopotamia the major part of the Intercultural Style corpus was uncovered. Here, the vessels were found almost exclusively in elite-burial or temple context and thus might have functioned as luxury goods elevating the local elites above the masses. In Tepe Yahya’s occupation phase, associated with its peak of Intercultural Style production, almost no monumental elite houses, burials or temples have been found so far. Since almost all Intercultural Style fragments were found in its production context and the lack of evidence for local elites, local consumption of the Intercultural Style must have been very limited. Based on these notions, Kohl suggested Tepe Yahya was part of the periphery of Mesopotamia, which extracted (prestige) goods and raw resources in the form of tribute or other forms of unidirectional exchange (Kohl 1975:135).

5.4 The exchange and value of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels

In *“Seeds of Upheaval”* Kohl suggests that: ‘… the carved Intercultural Style fragments were primarily distributed through long-distance organized trade that was controlled and directed by a class of merchants or individual entrepreneurs who were motivated by a desire to optimize their return and receive as high a profit as possible without jeopardizing the continuance of their trade’ (Kohl 1975: 454-455) According to him, luxury goods like the “Intercultural Style” vessels, produced in specialized highland settlements like Tepe Yahya, were traded for agricultural surplus. The more specialized production in these highland settlements became, the more they came to depend on a constant stream of agricultural surplus (Kohl in Potts, T.F. 1989: 144).

The plausibility of this interpretation can be put to the question, once we consider the enormous distance involved in this trade; the distance between southern Mesopotamia and Susa to Tepe Yahya is roughly 1000 km, overland transport of foodstuffs at this huge scale to sustain Tepe Yahya in exchange for the ‘Intercultural Style’ does not seem feasible. Even if we assume direct long-distance trade between Tepe Yahya and Mesopotamia, the scale of this trade must have been small. The ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels have never been mentioned in surviving third millennium texts (Potts, T.F. 1989: 144) and quantitatively little more than 600 ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels have been found (David 1995: 31). But what if the main

distribution area of the ‘Intercultural Style’ was not Mesopotamia but within Iran? This would solve some of the issues raised while creating others. Tepe Yahya is the only Iranian site[2] with a convincing amount of Intercultural Style fragments. In the absence of a clear nearby consuming market there is little to justify Tepe Yahya’s continued existence as a specialized highland production center.

Even so, some commercial trade of the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels must have existed beyond the Iranian highlands. Large quantities of the vessels were excavated in Tarut, which was a major trade depot at the time, in close proximity to the Iranian highlands and Tepe Yahya. Different types of chlorite used for the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels point at multiple production sites within the Iranian highlands trading with Tarut, indicating direct contact between these Iranian settlements and Tarut. Through Tarut, ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels may have been incidentally traded to Mesopotamia (Potts, T.F. 1989: 145). Incidental trade may likewise explain the presence of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels in Bactria and the Indus valley.

If the main area of distribution for the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels was in Iran, what exchange-mechanics, besides incidental trade, might explain their presence in Mesopotamia? The context in which the Mesopotamian ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels were found gives us a clue. Within southern Mesopotamia and Mari, the temple and burial context in which most of the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels were found, indicate they were objects of high (religious) value and prestige. ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels were found in several of the main temples in Mari, Nippur, Khafajeh, Ur and Susa and in two of the Royal Tombs of Ur (Parrot 1956 & 1967, Kohl 1979, Delougaz 1960, Woolley 1934 & 1955 and Amiet 1986 in Potts, T.F. 1989: 142). The rarity and special consideration with which the ‘Intercultural Style’ objects were treated would be consistent with high status plunder objects. Early Akkadian texts like Sargon’s royal inscriptions frequently mention military expeditions into Iran, which regularly resulted in the taking of booty from conquered cities (Potts, D.T. 1999: 102, Potts, T.F. 1989: 144). This plundering of objects can explain a minor incidental ‘involuntary’ influx of ‘Intercultural Style’ objects with high prestige through their association with military campaigns. During the Third Dynasty of Ur period the focus of Mesopotamian military campaigns shifted to the northern-central Zagros, where ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels were not available for plunder (Potts, T.F. 1989: 145), which thus may account for the gradual disappearance of the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels in Mesopotamian context.

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2 Again, with the exception of Jiroft, where huge amounts of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels have been recently discovered. In the absence of a proper publication, I do not consider archaeological data from Jiroft. Other sites like Shahr-i Shōkhta have yielded a limited amount of ‘Intercultural Style’ fragments.

6. Conclusion

South-West Asia during the mid-third millennium BC was a diverse area incorporating many different cultures with very diverse socio-economic organizations. From the still consolidating urbanized plains of southern Mesopotamia overland trade routes went through the remote

Iranian highlands far to the east to the Indus valley and north to Bactria. In the Iranian highlands, Baluchistan and the Arabian Gulf, specialized local production and trade centers developed out of existing settlements, connecting the great urban centers. The extend of urban control over these settlements was limited. Tepe Yahya and other Iranian settlements showed remarkably little Mesopotamian influence in their material culture. The specialized nature of these highlands economies however did make them dependent on trade and a reorientation of trade routes to the Arabian Gulf during the second half of the third millennium BC, which may have contributed to the decline of Tepe Yahya and other settlements in the Iranian highlands. A similar disruptive effect on indigenous cultures can be seen when the main trade routes between the Harappan civilization and Bactria change to bypass these cultures in favor of direct trade routes between the two. An important piece of the puzzle in interpreting intercultural economic relations seems to be missing through for lack of archaeological evidence for an indigenous Iranian consumption market for ‘Intercultural Style’ and other locally produced luxury goods. Perhaps the discovery of major Iranian urban settlements like Jiroft can shed new light on this puzzle.

Even though the scale of direct trade of specialized luxury goods between Mesopotamia and the Iranian highlands was probably limited around the mid-third millennium BC, the presence of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels in Mesopotamian context is indisputable. In this thesis I set out to elaborate on the nature of intercultural contacts between Mesopotamia and the Iranian highlands based on these vessels. If there had been direct trade with the Iranian production sites of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels, it would be likely that the production of these vessels was specifically tailored for export to Mesopotamia, thus explaining their Mesopotamian-style figurative art. However, instead of through trade, the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels were probably obtained during Mesopotamian military expeditions in the form of booty. This raises the question where the figurative art displayed on the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels originated from. It shows clear influence from Mesopotamia, but has Iranian and Harappan elements as well, resulting in a mixed art, not specifically tailored for just one culture. During the Uruk period Mesopotamian expansion into the Iranian highlands infused the ‘Proto-Elamite’ culture with Mesopotamian material culture, which is apparent in the ‘Proto-Elamite’ writings and also in its figurative art. I argue that after the demise of the Uruk expansionist phase, when the Iranian highland societies started to develop autonomously, this Southern Mesopotamian influence on their figurative art maintained its presence, culminating 500 years later in the ‘Intercultural Style’.

In a sense, the value and exchange of ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels illustrate the fallacy of world-system theory, or at least its application to Mesopotamian relations with its eastern

neighbors. The exchange of these vessels shows how the economic, political and ideological control from Mesopotamia over the Iranian highlands was not absolute. The few vessels which found their way out of the indigenous Iranian trade networks and ended up in Mesopotamia, seem to have arrived there only through incidental trade or plunder. And while at first glance the ‘Intercultural Style’ vessels seem thoroughly inspired by Mesopotamian figurative art, they appear to be more of a ‘composite art’ inspired by many cultures. This ‘Trans-Elamite’ culture group may ultimately have had its roots in Uruk period art, but does not link directly to the Sumerian period. Another assumption on which the world-system theory is based, the passive role of the periphery, is perhaps more based on a lack of archaeological data in the periphery of Mesopotamia; the sites we do know in the Iranian highlands do not point at passiveness, but instead emphasize autonomous development and small scale local initiative. The Uruk period levels of Tepe Yahya show Mesopotamian influence, but by the mid third millennium there is remarkably little to suggest direct influence and top-down control. Tepe Yahya’s focus on stone working production seems to have been a local development, in which the settlement specialized up to the point where it became largely reliant on the exchange of their produce for food. A disruption in this trade may have caused stone carvers to move out and practice their craft in Tarut or other expanding trade depots along the Arabian Gulf.

7. References

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