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Investigating the Scenes of Daily Activities on Ancient Elamite seals during the Susa II Period

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Abstract: *A seal is typically made of stone or mineral material, ivory, shell, metal, wood, clay, or a combination of bitumen, and usually bears an engraved design. In this study, we aim to examine and analyze the scenes related to daily activities depicted on Elamite seals. In this research, 29 seal impressions associated with scenes of daily activities from the Susa II period have been investigated and evaluated. The selection of these seal impressions was based on factors such as the clear location of discovery, precise dating, clarity of the designs and scenes on the seal (lack of damage to the engraving), and the credibility of the source providing information about the seal and its impression. In this study, Elamite seals (Susa II) have been compared in terms of iconography, classification, and then with contemporaneous seals in Mesopotamia. Generally, the motifs observed on Elamite seals of the Susa II period that can be classified within the framework of daily activities include: agriculture and cultivation, animal husbandry, issuance and transportation of goods, activities related to grain storage, workshop activities, hunting, and minstrelsy. By examining these motifs, it can be observed that women were often engaged in agricultural activities, work in various workshops such as pottery and weaving, and some activities related to animal husbandry, while men were engaged in more physically demanding and time-consuming tasks; for example, men were more involved in agriculture, hunting, animal husbandry, and laboring.*

Key words: Iran, Seals, Elamite Period, Susa II, Motif, Daily Activities

Introduction

A seal is typically made of stone or mineral material, ivory, shell, metal, wood, clay, or a combination of bitumen, and usually bears an engraved design, so that when pressed onto a soft material (initially in the Near East, made of soft or unbaked clay), it

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creates a raised pattern.¹ In archaeological literature, small portable objects made of stone, clay, bone, or metal, typically ranging from 1-5 centimeters in diameter, with an engraved surface in relief or incised, and a loop handle with a hole, are considered seals.² The impression created by a seal is also quite misleading and is generally referred to as a “seal”. However, to avoid confusion, researchers typically use the term “seal impression” to describe the impression left by a seal.³ Seals and seal impressions provide information about the administration and control mechanisms of a society, serving as evidence of trade and social relations within a single community and between communities.⁴

In Ancient Near East (including Iran), two types of seals have been used: cylindrical seals and stamp seals; until the beginning of the Elamite period, stamp seals were widely used. The stamp seal was the first type of seal found in this region, appearing probably for the first time around 7000 BCE and gradually becoming prevalent around 4500 BCE.⁵ With the beginning of the Proto Elamite period, significant cultural developments occur in southwestern Iran; the impacts of these developments are most evident in seals, seal-making, and their extensive uses in various fields;⁶ the civilization of Elam was situated in southwestern Iran and neighbored the civilizations of Mesopotamia (Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria). Ancient Elam encompassed the lands of Khuzestan and Fars, as well as parts of the modern provinces of Kerman, Lorestan, and Kurdistan [Fig. 1].⁷ During this period, the use of cylindrical seals becomes prevalent, and due to the ease of use and having more space for engraving, it gradually replaces stamp seals. The engraved motifs on cylindrical seals are often intricate and include religious, mythological, daily activities, naturalistic, composite, and geometric scenes.⁸ Given the special significance of seals and seal impressions and the existence of engraved motifs with various themes, it is possible to investigate various economic, administrative, commercial, social, cultural, and artistic aspects of past societies, including ancient Elam. In this study, scenes related to daily activities depicted on Elamite seals have been analyzed, addressing the following questions: What activities do the motifs related to daily scenes depict? Who are the individuals depicted in scenes of daily activities? What social, cultural, and political interpretations can be derived from these scenes?

¹ Roaf, 1990: 70.

² Makkay, 1984; Wickede, 1990; Budja, 2003; Skeates, 2007; Atakuman, 2015: 760-761.

³ Collon, 1990: 11; Roach, 2008: 9.

⁴ Gelb, 1977; Rathje, 1977; Renger, 1977; Collon, 1990: 21-30.

⁵ Collon, 1997: 11.

⁶ Talaei, 2019: 56.

⁷ Majidzadeh, 1991: 1.

⁸ Amiet, 1972a; Collon, 2005; Roach, 2008.



Fig. 1. The territory of the Elamite Civilization (after Roach, 2008: 48. Fig. 1.3)

Research Background

In comparison to the Mesopotamian region, extensive research has not been conducted on the Elamite seals, and many important aspects of these objects remain unexplored and unstudied.⁹ Furthermore, independent research on the scenes of daily activities depicted on Elamite seals has not been conducted so far. It can be assumed that the main reason for neglecting scenes of daily activities in favor of other themes is the researchers' perception of these scenes as insignificant; another reason could be the scarcity and limited seals associated with scenes of daily activities. Most of the conducted research has focused on seals depicting mythical, religious, geometric, animal, and plant scenes.

The present study was conducted using a documentary research method, and data collection was carried out in a library manner, meaning that images of seals and their impressions, along with relevant historical information, were extracted from various sources such as books and articles. In this research, 29 seals related to scenes of daily activities from the Susa II period were examined and evaluated. The selection of these seals was based on criteria such as the clear location of discovery, precise epigraphy, clear depiction of motifs and scenes (no destruction of the pattern), and the credibility of the source providing information about the seal and its impression. In the current study, Elamite seals (Susa II) have been classified based on iconography (depicted

⁹ Among the studies conducted on Elamite seals, mention can be made of research by scholars such as William H. Ward (1919); Pierre Amiet (1972b; 1973; 1980; 1986), who has conducted a significant portion of Iranian seal studies; Edith Porada (1970; 1993; 2004); Mahmoud Rashad (1990), who conducted a comprehensive study of the earliest stamp seals in Iran; Collon (1987; 1997; 2005), who has provided studies on Elamite seals; Karen J. Roach (2008), who, in her doctoral thesis, examined engraved motifs on seals and the function of cylinder seals in Elam; other research has been conducted by Walter Hintz (2009), Friedrich Wilhelm König (1965), and some Iranian researchers such as Beyani Malekzadeh (1984), Zahra Jowzi (1993), Reza Mehrfarin (1996) and Yousef Majidzadeh (2008).

motifs on the seals) and then compared with contemporary seals from other regions such as Mesopotamia.

Research Findings

The shapes of flat Elamite seals include: button-shaped, semi-lenticular, spherical, semi-spherical, conical, rectangular, oval, semi-barrel-shaped, tabbed-shaped, and figuratively shaped; the motifs used on stamp Elamite seals are often simple and include: complex and simple crosses, hatched lines, four-part designs, lines and circles, lattice patterns, wavy and zigzag lines, spiral and strip motifs, and rarely human and animal motifs; the material of stamp Elamite seals is generally made of hard, semi-precious, and colorful stones such as white marble, soapstone, lapis lazuli, limestone, hematite, agate, metals, natural bitumen, baked clay, quartz, gypsum, ferrite, faience, and basalt.¹⁰ Additionally, Elamite cylinder seals are made of various materials such as white marble, limestone, natural bitumen, agate, soapstone, hematite, quartz, lapis lazuli, metals like gold, iron, and alloy, glass, and baked clay.¹¹ In the following, we will introduce the 29 selected seal impressions.

Fig. 2A, depicts a cylinder seal obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal shows a person plowing the land with a plough; on the left side (upper part of the image), the image of a hunting dog is also observed.

Fig. 2B, is a cylinder seal obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period; this seal depicts individuals plowing the land with a “hoe”.

Fig. 2C, is a cylinder seal obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal depicts the image of a woman touching something resembling a tree with her two hands.

Fig. 2D, is a cylinder seal obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal depicts a woman wearing a long robe holding a basket in one hand and collecting crops with the other hand.

Fig. 3A, depicts a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal impression shows a person approaching a bundle of fodder to feed a cow. Additionally, a bird motif is observed at the bottom of the scene.

Fig. 3B, is a cylindrical seal impression also obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal impression depicts a woman directing goats or sheep into a pen. On the left side of the scene, individuals are seen likely involved in storing dairy products.

Fig. 3C, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. Two individuals are depicted in the scene, seemingly milking or picking wool, or guiding goats.

Fig. 3D, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal impression depicts a person with one hand raised and the other

¹⁰ Amiet, 1972b; Porada, 1970; 1993; Collon, 1990.

¹¹ Amiet, 1972b; Collon, 1987; Porada, 1970; 1993.

hand placed on the back of a cow. Above the cow's head, two vessels are seen, and beneath its neck, the stem of a plant is visible.

Fig. 4A, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, six individuals are depicted carrying objects, but the nature of these objects cannot be determined with certainty.

Fig. 4B, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This scene shows people moving and carrying something resembling fabric or hide.

Fig. 4C, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, individuals hold rectangular objects above their heads and are in motion.

Fig. 4D, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, a pot is tied to a wooden stick with a rope and placed on the shoulders for easier transportation.

Fig. 5A, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This scene consists of three parts: the first part, located at the bottom and center of the scene, depicts a person working on a jar. The second part, in the center of the scene and at the top, appears to show a person placing lids on three jars. The third part, seen at the bottom right of the scene, shows three individuals working on pottery objects. It's worth noting that this scene is repeated in two other seals with the same theme (Figs. 5C-D); in this part of the scene, two individuals are seated on the ground and working on pottery objects, while the third person, standing, appears to be supervising their work.

Fig. 5B, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This scene consists of three parts: the first part, located at the bottom left of the scene, depicts two individuals sitting in front of each other and working with circle-like objects. The second part, at the bottom right of the scene, shows two individuals working on a jar. The third part, at the top of the scene, displays several jars.

Fig. 5C, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This scene consists of three parts: the first part, located at the top left of the scene, depicts two individuals, one of whom is seated on the ground, holding a rectangular object. The second part, in the center and at the bottom of the scene, shows a person working with board-like objects. The third part, on the right side of the scene, shows two standing individuals placing something into jars.

Fig. 5D, is a cylindrical seal impression found at the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this image, three men are depicted: on the left side of the scene, a silo is shown with a ladder placed on its wall, and a man carrying a vessel on his shoulder is ascending it; another man is present in the center of the scene, bent over and holding a rectangular object; another man is also present on the right side, but only the image of his hands remains visible; in front of this person, tablet-like and narrow objects are placed.

Fig. 5E, is a cylindrical seal impression found at the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. On this seal impression, two men on the right side of the scene are lifting a jar from the ground, and on the left side of the scene, a storeroom and a ladder next to it are visible (similar to Fig. 5D).

Fig. 6A, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. This seal impression consists of two parts showing individuals working on several jars.

Fig. 6B, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. This scene consists of two parts: the first part, on the left side of the scene, shows two women working on a jar. The second part, on the right side, depicts a person who looks like carrying two animal skins.

Fig. 6C, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, individuals appear to be weaving fabric using a loom weaving; on the right side of the scene, a person seems to be supervising, while in the center, two other individuals are seen working with the weaving device.

Fig. 6D, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, women are depicted working with a loom weaving; four women are depicted, two of whom are seated on a platform-like stool and two others are standing. Basket-like objects are also depicted in this scene.

Fig. 6E, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. On the left side of the scene, a woman appears to be engaged in kneading. On the right side of the scene, a woman is depicted sitting on a platform-like stool and engaged in spinning yarn. A scorpion and a dog are also present in the scene.

Fig. 7A, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, individuals are depicted returning from fishing; on the right side, a person is seen inside a boat holding a paddle. In the center of the image, another person has a vessel-like object above their head, and in front of them, a fish is depicted. On the left side of the scene, another person is seen holding a fish.

Fig. 7B, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, a boar is surrounded by three hunting dogs; on the left side, a hunter is depicted holding a long object (spear or stick) and observing the hunting scene.

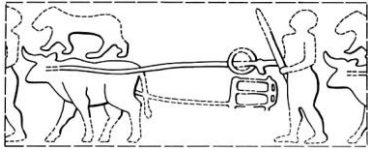
Fig. 7C, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, a person is hunting a lion and a boar with a bow and arrow. The lion and boar have been hit by several arrows.

Fig. 7D, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Susa site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, a person is depicted hunting a lion (?) with a bow and arrow. A dog is standing in front of the lion, engaged in a fight.

Fig. 7E, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, a hunter is depicted hunting a goat or deer with a bow and arrow; also, a hunting dog is depicted attacking the prey.

Fig. 8A, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, individuals in two rows are seen with their hands on their faces and their heads raised; it appears that these individuals are singing.

Fig. 8B, is a cylindrical seal impression obtained from the Chogha Mish site and belonging to the Susa II period. In this scene, we see a banquet accompanied by music. Individuals are playing musical instruments and singing; also, on the right side of the scene, a person can be seen serving a high-ranking person



A. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 146B



B. Amiet, 1972b: no 621

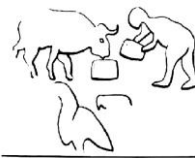


C. Amiet, 1972b: no 708



D. Amiet, 1972b: no 711

Fig. 2



A. Amiet, 1980: no 256



B. Amiet, 1972b: no 620

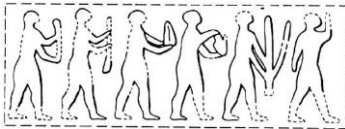


C. Amiet, 1972b: no 614



D. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 145A

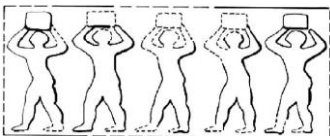
Fig. 3



A. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 33d,152d



B. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 34I-K,153D

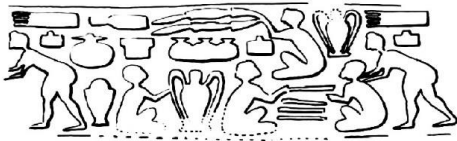


C. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 35G-H, 35J,152F



D. Amiet, 1972b: no 667

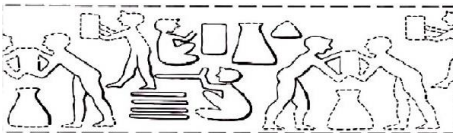
Fig. 4



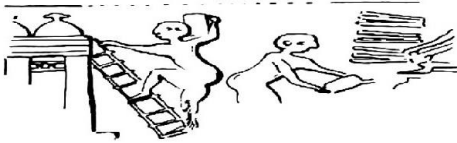
A. Amiet, 1972b: no 646



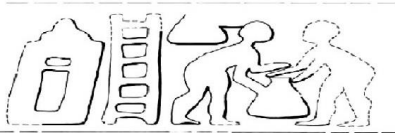
B. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 35A-B,32G-L,148D



C. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 45O, 148B



D. Amiet, 1972b: no 663



E. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 44f, 149a

Fig. 5



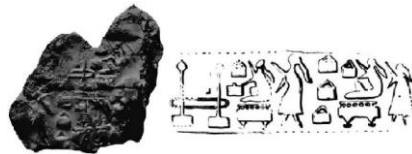
A. Amiet, 1972b: no 650



B. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 33I-J, 153C



C. Amiet, 1972b: no 673

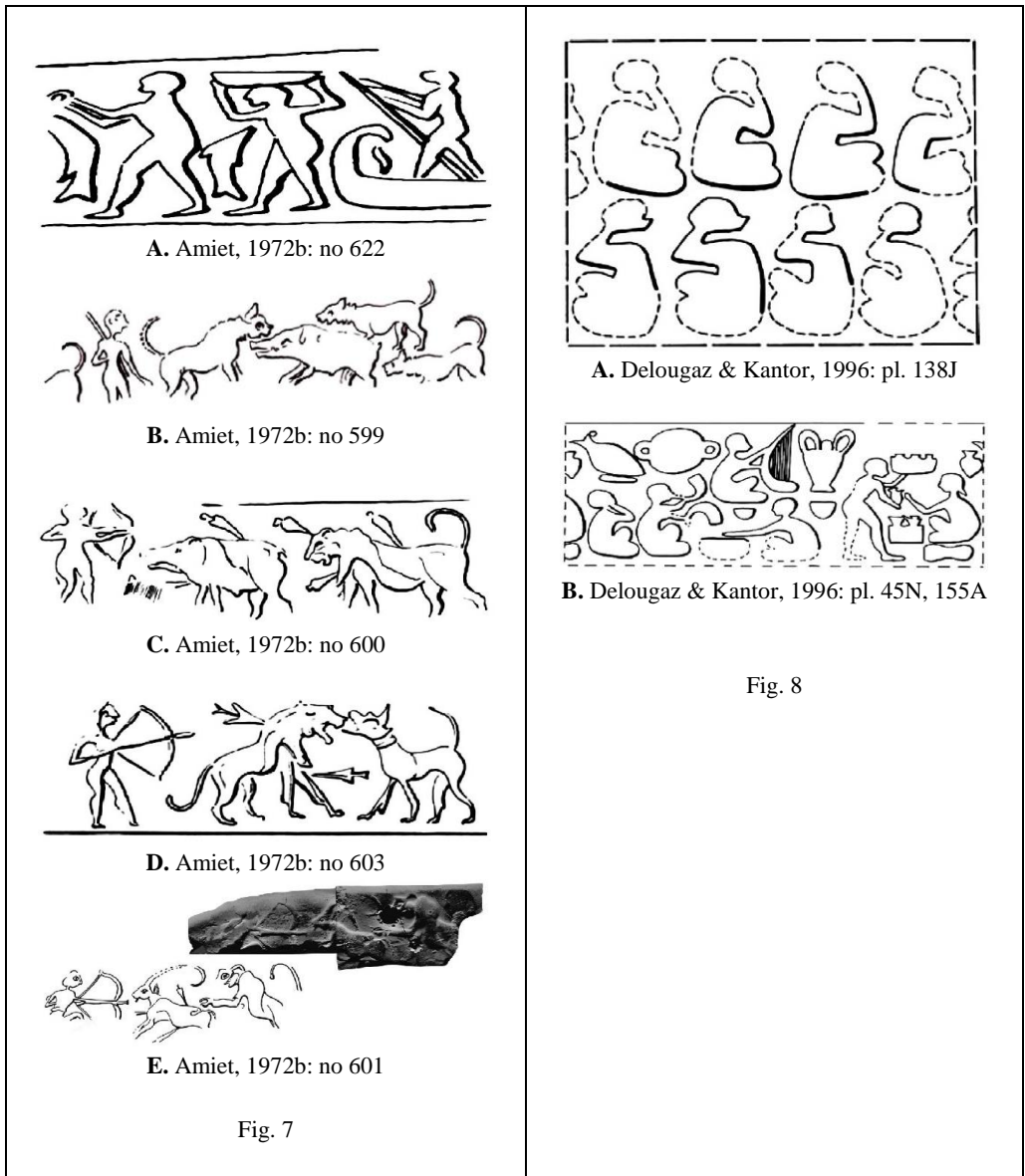


D. Amiet, 1972b: no 671



E. Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: pl. 44D, G,146F

Fig. 6



Discussion

The first step in studying scenes of daily activities is to provide a clear and comprehensive definition of “daily activities”. Daily activities have a clear definition in ordinary daily life, but for studying these activities on Elamite cylinder seals and within archaeological frameworks, a reinterpretation is necessary. Daily activities encompass all actions that individuals perform on a daily basis based on personal or

group habits to meet their biological and livelihood needs. Some of these activities are depicted in engraved patterns on Elamite cylinder seals, especially during the Susa II period. It should be noted that these seals and seal impressions are without textual inscriptions, and the identification and interpretation of the type of activity are solely based on the elements and patterns present in the scene. Some of the engraved patterns on the seals are such that multiple interpretations can be provided; also, various factors such as illegibility or damage to the patterns or the rudimentary nature of engraving techniques make it difficult to interpret and analyze the scenes based on the constructive and proprietary thinking of the maker and seal owner. It should be noted that daily activities can include various tasks; some of these activities are specialized tasks performed by different individuals on a daily basis. These activities have a wide variety, and generally, each individual performs these specialized activities based on living conditions and personal and collective needs; however, only activities engraved on the seals that are of special importance have been depicted; these activities include production, workshop, industrial, and labor-related tasks. These activities have been investigated in terms of their collective perspective and their impact on the daily lives of individuals in Elamite society.

In general, the motifs observed on Susa II seals can be classified within the framework of daily activities, including: agriculture and cultivation, animal husbandry, export and import and transportation of goods, activities related to grain storage, workshop activities, hunting, and minstrelsy.

In the 4th millennium BC, the patterns on Susa II seals addressed the details of social and economic life. These motifs vividly depicted agricultural activities, grain storage, export and import and transportation of goods, and indicated the existence of worker and employer classes. In these images, men were mostly engaged in activities requiring high physical strength, such as agriculture, labor, and hunting; conversely, women were involved in lighter activities such as weaving, Pottery production, spinning, milking, butter production, farming, and working in fields. Elamite seals used delicate modeling to represent women and men engaged in various activities, with seated individuals having a higher knee position than the other knee, along with a variety of hairstyles and clothing models that could determine gender. This depiction has turned these patterns into a beautiful and vivid portrayal of the social life and daily activities of that period.¹² The type of activities of workers in agriculture and industry depicted in the seal impressions provides important information for studying the technological and social developments of this period.¹³

¹² Hintz, 1993: 30-32; Delougaz & Kantor, 1996: 136; Mesbah Ardakani & Dadvar, 2008: 5; Álvarez-Mon, 2020: 114.

¹³ Porada, 1993.

Agriculture and Cultivation

The Khuzestan Plain, due to its abundant water resources, biodiversity, fertile soil, sufficient and abundant rainfall, has always been recognized as a region with very favorable conditions for the development of agriculture, cultivation, and animal husbandry since ancient times. This region has been the center of rainfed agriculture for historical nomadic tribes.¹⁴ Some of the motifs on Susa II seals depict scenes related to agricultural activities such as plowing, sowing seeds, and harvesting; by studying these seals, one can gain comprehensive and practical information about the types of tools and methods used by villagers during activities such as sowing seeds, plowing land, and harvesting grains with greater accuracy; it is also possible to understand how tasks are divided between women and men in these activities. Laborers perform planting, tending, and harvesting crops daily and throughout the seasons of agriculture. In Figs. 2A and B, we witness two different methods of land plowing. It appears that in these two seal impressions, men are engaged in agricultural activities due to the difficult nature of the work and the need for greater physical strength. Considering the motifs of the seals, fields were prepared using hoes, and deeper plowing was done using iron plows. Hoes and similar tools, along with iron plows, were still used in the Near East until contemporary times.

On Susa II seals, women can be seen collecting crops in fields. In Figs. 2C and D, women are depicted gathering crops. To create a distinction between women and men in these seal impressions, in addition to hairstyles, women's clothing is also depicted as longer.

Animal Husbandry

Figs. 3A-D contain scenes related to animal husbandry activities. The presence of these seal impressions during the Susa II period indicates the importance of animal husbandry in the economy and livelihood of that period. The presence of domestic animals such as cows, goats, or sheep in these seal impressions indicates the importance of meat and dairy products in this period for meeting part of the dietary needs of the Elamite society; the importance of leather products cannot be overlooked either. As previously mentioned, some of the seal impressions contain two different activities that seem to be related to each other. In Fig. 3B, we see a seal impression with two different activities. The first activity is animal husbandry; the second activity could be pottery-making or dairy storage, with the latter being more compatible with the first activity. Considering these points, it can be assumed that this seal belonged to facilities engaged in animal husbandry that produced dairy products or other livestock products

¹⁴ Alizadeh, 2013b.

for sale. Regarding the seating arrangement of these men, it must be noted that scenes of men one behind the other in a row squatting and sometimes depicted with animals are not seen on Mesopotamian seals, but are abundant in the Susiana Plain (Khuzestan).¹⁵ The activity depicted in Fig 3C, cannot be precisely identified, but it likely represents a related activity to animal husbandry. It appears that individuals present in the scene are either gathering wool or milking goats. Fig. 3D, despite its various shapes and elements including a cow, plant stems, and various vessels, is introduced as a seal impression associated with animal husbandry activity.

The primary purpose of creating these motifs is to introduce animal husbandry, explain related activities, and provide a form of advertisement to attract attention to this activity. These seal impressions, as symbols of animal husbandry, guide the audience toward better understanding of this activity. It should be remembered that animal husbandry and related activities require daily attention and care; individuals involved in this activity devote several hours of their daily lives to it.

Animal husbandry has been one of the primary activities for many individuals in the fertile plains of Khuzestan province from ancient times to the present. Even individuals who were not professionally engaged in animal husbandry or cattle farming usually raised some cattle at home to benefit from milk, yogurt, and butter for their household needs. In addition to men, women and children were also involved in activities related to animal husbandry and the production of dairy products; these activities not only helped improve the living standards of families but also contributed to the fulfillment of the needs of villages and cities on a larger scale. Nomadic herders, who reside in Khuzestan during the winter and migrate to high-altitude pastures in other regions during the summer, engage in animal husbandry as one of their main occupations. Archaeological evidence shows that since the late 7th millennium BC, the inhabitants of this region have been engaged in animal husbandry and agriculture. The deep interest of Zagros nomadic pastoralists in agriculture, through the use of agricultural lands and stable political conditions, encourages some individuals to transition gradually from animal husbandry to agriculture and become somewhat sedentary, considering the preservation of tribal relationships and their rights. This economic convergence not only contributes to the improvement of individuals' economic conditions but also helps sustainable development and balance in the economic structure of the region.¹⁶

¹⁵ Alizadeh, 2013a: 17.

¹⁶ Hole, 1974; Mehrafarin, 1996: 98; Alizadeh, 2010; 2013a: 357.

Export, Import, and Transportation of Goods

Activities related to the transportation and movement of goods can be observed in Figs. 4A-D. Additionally, the movement of goods and their motif on seals and seal impressions can play a very important and extensive role in daily activities. This activity can include the movement of tools, equipment, and even materials needed for various specialized and commercial activities. This activity falls into the category of daily activities that were undoubtedly carried out on a daily basis by workers to meet various societal needs for the movement of goods. This movement of goods can occur in various dimensions within a city, region, or sub-region for trading goods to meet various economic and livelihood needs. Some of these goods, such as jars and containers, are recognizable and identifiable, while others are not. These objects could be offerings for a temple (Fig. 4A), tools and raw materials for various workshop activities (Fig. 4B), or prepared grains for storage in silos (Figs. 4C and D) being carried by individuals. It is also possible that these seals belonged to merchants who traveled to other areas for buying and selling goods. In Fig. 4A, individuals are likely engaged in transporting branches or ivory; these objects, besides their material and aesthetic value, have significantly featured on the seals while being placed on the walls of temples. In Fig. 4B, a person can be seen holding something resembling fabric, probably preparing to transport it to other workshops after preparation.

Activities Related to Grain Storage

Activities related to grain storage can be observed in Figs. 5A-E. In Figs 5A-C, the initial stages of preparing grains for storage can be seen. Individuals with various responsibilities are engaged in the process; some place grains inside jars and cover them, while others, likely, are involved in calculations or recording information on clay tablets. In Figs. 5D and E, the final stages of grain storage are visible. In these seal impressions, grain storage silos with access from the roof are depicted, as well as workers engaged in calculations and climbing ladders to reach the roof of the silos while holding jars and packages of grains. In these seal impressions, a systematic process can be identified from the initial stages of preparing grains to their storage in silos; after storage, the process of distribution and sale of grains at the city or regional level would have taken place. The seal impressions indicate that these people had the ability to store a considerable volume of grains, which had significant economic value.¹⁷ Workers carried out this process on a daily basis; it is evident that workers were not engaged in this activity throughout the year, and it was only during

¹⁷ Álvarez-Mon, 2020: 116.

the harvest seasons that this activity took place, while in other seasons, workers had to engage in other activities to make a living.

Workshop Activities

Workshop activities can be observed in Figs. 6A-C. These activities include pottery production (Figs. 6A and B), working with loom weaving (Figs. 6C and D), and spinning yarn and produce butter (Fig. 6E). It should be noted that these activities were carried out for domestic purposes or in bulk to meet the needs of society. Figs. 6A and B show that in addition to men, women were also engaged in pottery produce. In Figs. 6C and D, individuals can be seen working with loom weaving; the gender of the individuals present in Fig. 6C is not clear, but Fig. 6D and all the seal impressions associated with this activity from the Susa II period show women engaged in this activity. In Figure 6e, two women are seen spinning yarn and butter produce; one woman spinning yarn is seated on a platform, which could signify her high social status; opposite to this woman, a dog and a scorpion are depicted, which could be symbols of religious concepts.¹⁸ Some aspects of daily life, even if they do not have religious significance, are somehow related to gods and their temples.¹⁹ Among the Mesopotamians, the dog symbolized the goddess of healing and health, called Gula; additionally, the dog could be considered one of the aspects of the mother goddess.²⁰ Similarly, in Elamite myths, the scorpion symbolized Ishi-Ara, the goddess of oaths, guarantees, and judgment.²¹ Considering the depictions of the dog and scorpion, these two women might symbolize two goddesses.

Hunting

Scenes of hunting can be observed in Figs. 7A-E. In these seal impressions, individuals can be seen fishing and hunting various animals such as lions, goats, deer, and wild boars using bows and arrows and hunting dogs; the depiction of these animals indicates their presence in the Elamite geography. Hunting lions, besides using their skins, could also be seen as a display of power (Figs. 7C and D). Fishing and hunting wild boars, deer, and similar animals could have been done for the purpose of using their meat and skins (Figs. 7A-C and E). Despite the transition of humans to settled living and agriculture in the Neolithic period, hunting and gathering food remained important in subsequent periods. Undoubtedly, a part of the dietary needs of the Elamite society was met through the meat obtained from hunting various animals. Hunters

¹⁸ Delougaz & Kantor, 1996, 44D, G,146E.

¹⁹ Majidzadeh, 2018: 27.

²⁰ Cooper, 2003: 202-205.

²¹ Sarraf, 2008: 21, 140-141.

engaged in hunting on a daily basis either to meet their dietary and livelihood needs by selling the meat and skins obtained from hunting or simply for recreational purposes. The depiction of dogs in these seal impressions indicates the importance of this domestic animal in hunting. Since the Neolithic period, dogs have always assisted hunters in hunting; in ancient Elam, dogs were also considered symbols of the hunting god, depicted either as a dog with a bow in hand or sometimes as a goddess standing on the backs of hound dogs holding a bow, depicted on the seals.²²

Musician (Minstrel)

Scenes related to playing musical instruments can be observed in Fig. 8A and B. In these seal impressions, individuals are seen singing and playing various instruments. In Fig. 8A, individuals are seen placing their hands next to their ears with their heads raised; this movement is still used by Middle Eastern singers today. When the singer places their hand next to their ear, it helps them hear their own voice better and more realistically; it also helps them derive more energy from hearing their natural voice and control their energy and stamina, thus delaying fatigue. In Fig. 8B, a band is seen performing at a party. They are singing and playing percussion, string, and wind instruments. It should be noted that singers and musicians specialized in this activity, and their livelihood depended on it. They played music in various circles and gatherings on a daily basis.

The Susa II period in Elam coincided with the Uruk period in Mesopotamia, and daily motifs can be seen among the seals and seal impressions of this period. In Fig. 9, three seal impressions belonging to the Uruk period with motifs depicting activities related to animal husbandry are observed.

In Fig. 9A, a person in the center of the image is seen approaching a plant to two sheep or goats. Another person is also behind him, seemingly assisting him. This seal impression is comparable to the Elamite seal impression 3A, as both images depict one of the activities of animal husbandry, namely feeding the animals.

In Fig. 9B, a person is depicted holding two plants in their hands and approaching them to several goats and sheep. This seal impression is also comparable to the Elamite seal impression in Figure 3A, as it also depicts the activity of feeding the animals.

In Fig. 9C, in two rows at the top and bottom of the image, two individuals are seen herding sheep. It appears that these individuals are either leading the sheep to pasture or bringing them back from pasture. This seal impression is comparable to the Elamite seal impression in Fig. 3B, as it also depicts the activity of shepherds guiding and leading the sheep to and from pasture.

²² Qa'empanah, 2013: 86.



A. Moortgat, 1969: 313, pl. A, fig. 5



B. Frankfort, 1939: 333, pl. V, fig. d



C. Frankfort, 1939: 333, pl. V, fig. e

Fig. 9

In Fig. 10, a cylinder seal impression belonging to the Uruk period depicts a scene of goods transportation. In this seal impression, people are seen moving various objects, with the most recognizable being jars. These individuals are moving towards a rectangular volume resembling a building. This seal impression is similar to the cylinder seal impressions of Elamite in Figs. 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D. In each of these seal impressions, workers are seen transporting goods. However, another possibility is the performance of religious ceremonies and rituals by these individuals.



Fig. 10. Moortgat, 1969: 323, pl. K, fig. 2

In Fig. 11, a cylinder seal impression belonging to the Uruk period depicts a scene of hunting. In this seal impression, a person along with his attendants is depicted hunting ram or goats. It seems that this person holds a high rank. A notable aspect of this seal impression is the landscaping depicted in this scene; on this seal impression, besides the hunting scene, the ground beneath the individuals and a river in the middle of it at the bottom of the scene, a hill and a tree on it to the right of the scene, are visible. Such landscaping is not seen in the Elamite seals of the Susa II period. This seal impression is similar to the Elamite seal impressions in Figs. 7C, 7D, 7E. In all four seal impressions, the hunter is engaged in hunting various animals with a bow and arrow and hunting dog.

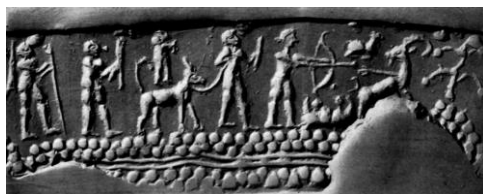


Fig. 11. Moortgar, 1969: 313, fig. 2

Conclusions

Specialized activities including agriculture and farming, animal husbandry, export, import, and transportation of goods, activities related to grain storage, workshop activities, hunting, and minstrelsy, analyzed in this study were all carried out by the people of the Elamite society during the Susa II period. It should be noted that men and women from the lower classes of society, including farmers and laborers, are depicted in these seals and seal impressions. In studies conducted on Elamite civilization, there are significant gaps regarding common people and their living conditions. This gap seems to have two causes: one due to the lack of cultural data related to this social class, and second, due to the lack of attention from specialists and archaeologists to this issue.

Seals and seal impressions are considered one of the most important sources of information for archaeologists. Unlike many reliefs and even seals and seal impressions depicting royal and mythological scenes, animals, and plants, seals and seal impressions depicting daily scenes provide abundant information about the daily life of ordinary people to specialists; alongside other archaeological data, they provide a more comprehensive view of the lives of the Elamite people and their livelihoods in the 4th millennium BC. The prevalence of daily motifs (animal husbandry, transportation of goods, and hunting) on Uruk period seals among the Mesopotamians, unlike

Elamite seals, continued in later periods, and such activities can be abundantly observed on Mesopotamian seals.

By examining the iconography of Susa II seals, it can be seen that women were often involved in agricultural activities, working in various workshops such as pottery produce and weaving, and some activities related to animal husbandry, while men were engaged in more labor-intensive tasks and those requiring physical strength, such as agriculture, hunting, animal husbandry, and laboring. Undoubtedly, these activities were closely related to each other. Engaging in agricultural activities such as planting, harvesting, and transporting crops, animal husbandry and dairy production, laboring, and workshop activities, hunting, and minstrelsy for livelihood or recreational purposes were all complementary and interconnected parts of an economic and social system.

Considering that the seal impressions studied were discovered in two important settlement areas of ancient Elam, namely Susa and Chogha Mish, and that these motifs have the highest frequency among the seals and seal impressions discovered in these two areas, it can be inferred that Susa and Chogha Mish were among the most important settlement centers of ancient Elam and played a key role in organizing trade and economic systems. In conclusion, the study of cylindrical seal impressions related to everyday activities indicates that Elamite society during the dawn of urbanization was highly dependent on human labor and had significant importance in organizing economic, political, and social systems, which were regulated by establishing a systematic administrative system for human labor and various activities.

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