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The Preliminary Report on Excavations at Eastern Residential Area of Shahr-i Sokhta: Rooms 27 and 28

Seyed Mansour Seyed Sajjadi¹, Hosein Moradi²

Introduction

Excavation on various parts of the Eastern Residential Area (ERA) of Shahr-I Sokhta with the aim of reaching the most ancient layers of period I began in 2017 (Seyyed Sajjadi and Moradi, 2019: 711). Based on the information obtained from previous excavations (Tosi, 1983), the new ones (1999-2018) as well as different test trenches in ERA between 2018 and 2020 (Moradi, 2022: forthcoming), it seems that the Eastern Residential Area was the main center of the city during the formation of period I of occupation of the site. Rooms 88 and 88a in the western part of Eastern Residential Area were excavated during last seasons. Also Rooms 27 and 28 in the center of the residential area were selected for new excavations, although parts of these rooms were investigated during the last season, from the beginning of December 2020 in a 5 X 4.5 meters square.

Room 27

Room 27 is located in the middle of the northern side of Street No 1 and the eastern part of residential area in square XIX (Fig. 1). The dimensions of this room are 3.5 by 2.5 meters. Parts of Room 27 to Layer 5 were excavated, which according to the shape of pottery assemblage could be associated with Phases 7 and 8 (3000-2800 BC). This room is built according to the earlier architectural tradition of Phase 9 in Room No. 88A (3300-3100 BC). Architectural elements of room consist of a 30 cm wide wall coated with attenuate clay and supporting walls. The construction of this type of supporting walls is an architectural tradition that has been used to stabilize the walls of large rooms, which are generally narrow. Layer 5 is characterized by a clay debris that was probably filled and substructure to build the main room, i.e. Room 27, with its coated narrow walls (Fig. 2), evidence of which are lined walls and closed entrances from Layers 4 to 2 (Fig. 3). The thickness of ancient remains in this room up to the virgin soil was 520 cm. According to the reports of an Italian expedition, the upper layers of this room, which includes a large volume of ancient accumulations up to Layer 3, belong to Phases 5 and 6 of the period II, but in lower Layers, 4 and 5, more expressive is Phase 8.

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Fig. 1. Aerial Photo of Eastern Residential Area.
Rooms Excavated in Recent Years. Number 3 Includes Rooms 27 and 28



Fig. 2. Square XIX Room 27 Space 1 and 2 Showing the Filling of Layer 4 with Mud Bricks

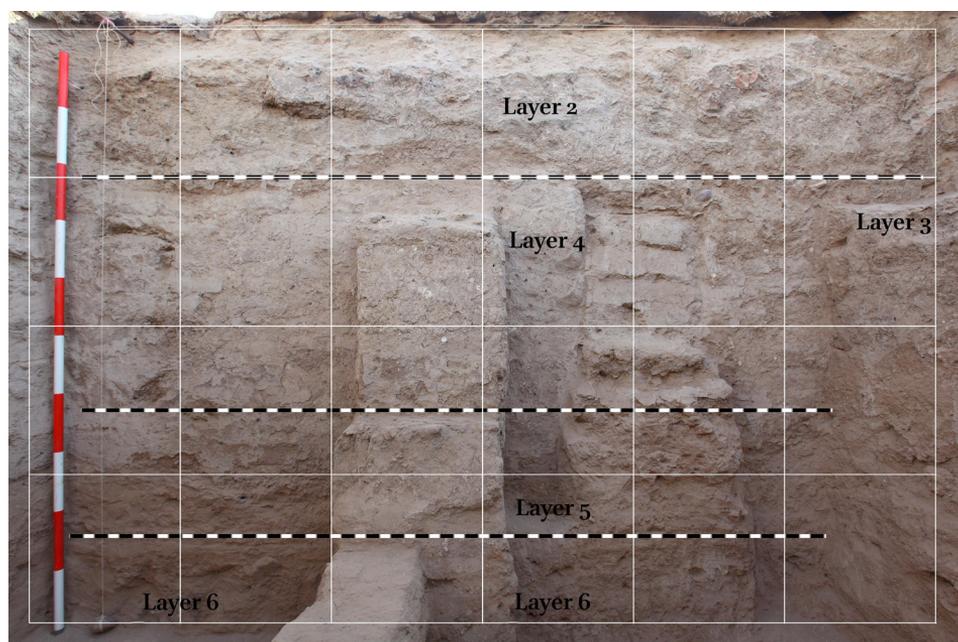


Fig. 3. Layers 2-6 of Eastern Wall of Room 27

Layer 1

The first layer in Room 27 consists of four walls at the upper levels, which seem to be uncoated and are stacked on top of three rows fastened bricks. The pottery of this layer is more related to the middle of the third millennium and the peak period of urbanization in Shahr-i Sokhta due to the abundance of pear-shaped beakers, painted bowl and jar fragments. Most of the non-pottery finds in this section are made of clay. A cylindrical shape figurine with curly hair and an eagle-shaped nose is very prominent.

The second layer consists of a coated wall, located just below the wall of the layer 1. The pottery patterns of this layer are a combination of elaborate and simple linear geometric patterns. Clay shapes represent the pottery characteristics of the middle phases of the third millennium. From this layer, a seal with 9 feathers has been found. The only sign of Layer 3 consists of an uncoated east-west wall that separates the southern part of Room 27 and is a sign of short-term use of this room (Fig. 3).

The fourth layer is built under the second layer and has been used as the foundation and main plan of Layer 2. The structure and architectural elements of this layer are the same as Layer 2 and it consists of two doors and two supports in the eastern and western walls. The walls of Layer 4, like Layer 2, have a white color coating (Fig. 4). The pottery of this layer is similar to the pottery of the upper layers. The fifth layer can be identified only from a floor at a depth of three meters from the edge of the trench, and its pottery is similar to those of Layer 4 with difference whose patterns and shapes represent Phase 9.

The remnants of Layer 6 are an uncoated wall that divides Room 27 into Space 1 in the south and Space 2 in the north. In the middle of this brick wall is a supporting wall (Fig. 5). Most of the pottery in this layer is covered with buff ware color paste.



Fig. 4. Layers of Southern Wall of Room 27

Patterned pottery with geometric motifs is light brown with thick lines.

Layer 7 consists of orange and brick color soils and debris, the effect of indirect and continuous heat on the soil is well visible. In general, this layer can be considered as part of the thick debris on the floor of layer 8. Most of the pottery in this layer is un-

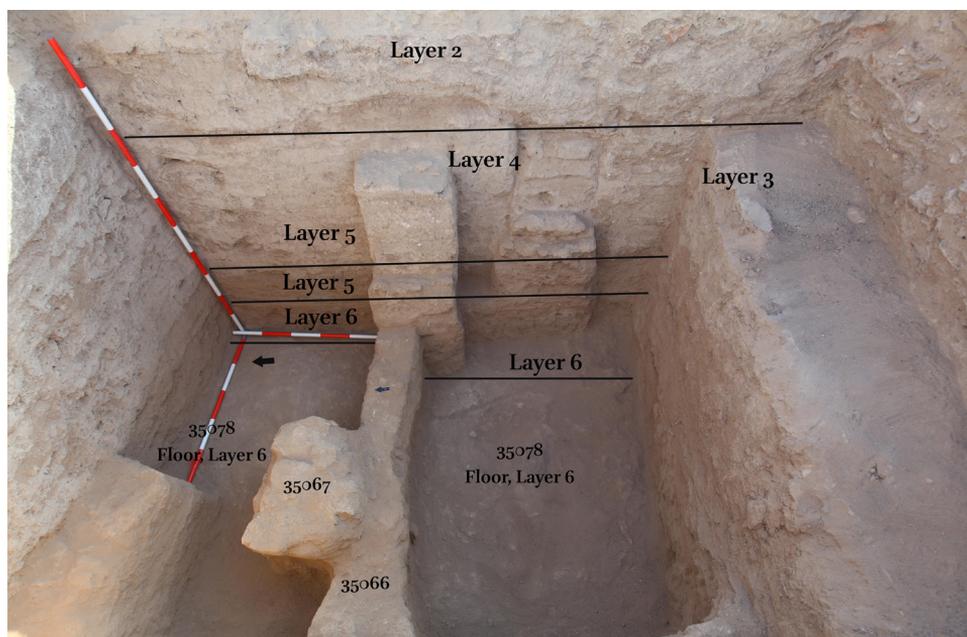


Fig. 5. Architectural Structures Related to Layer 6 in Room 27

painted, buff color and wheel made, with light and dark brown color geometric motifs

Layer 8 consists of a thin crust of about 20 cm thick that lies on a floor at a depth of -395 cm. The floor of this layer was originally built in connection with a narrow and lined wall on the east side, and the remains of the bricks of a heath furnace are in the form of debris on the floor of this layer. The bricks have a thick cream coating and some bricks have three holes (Fig. 6).

One of the important objects of this layer is a clay tablet which was located inside the western section of the trench (Fig. 7). In all this area, a thick layer of coal and ash can be seen. The distance from this area to the western side of the trench 40 cm and the southern side is 45 cm. around this hearth there is a eroded floor at a depth of -405. The location of the tablet (locus number 35073) is located next to the debris of the hearth, right next to the western wall of space no. 1 and in the western section of the trench. The tablet is rectangular with arched edges measuring 128 mm in length, 80 mm in width and 30 mm in thickness. Three sides of this plate are intact and one side is broken. It contains a number of geometric signs and a seal impression. At the top and right side of tablet there are three parallel carved lines and in a lower row and below these lines there are 30 concave rectangles with average dimensions of 4 x 6 mm in 5 rows, each row of 6 rectangular holes at regular intervals from each other. On the broken side edge of the tablet, traces of other holes are also visible. In addition, there is another rectangular hole in the fifth row, which brings the total number of holes to 30. According to the calculations, the number of rectangles in each row could be 10 and the number of rectangular holes in the fifth row could be 5, which brings the total number of holes to 45. These marks are incised horizontally from left to right. Below these marks and at the bottom of the fifth line is traces of a cylinder seal impression.



Fig. 6. Layer 8 in Room 27. The Location of the Tablet is Marked with a Black Circle

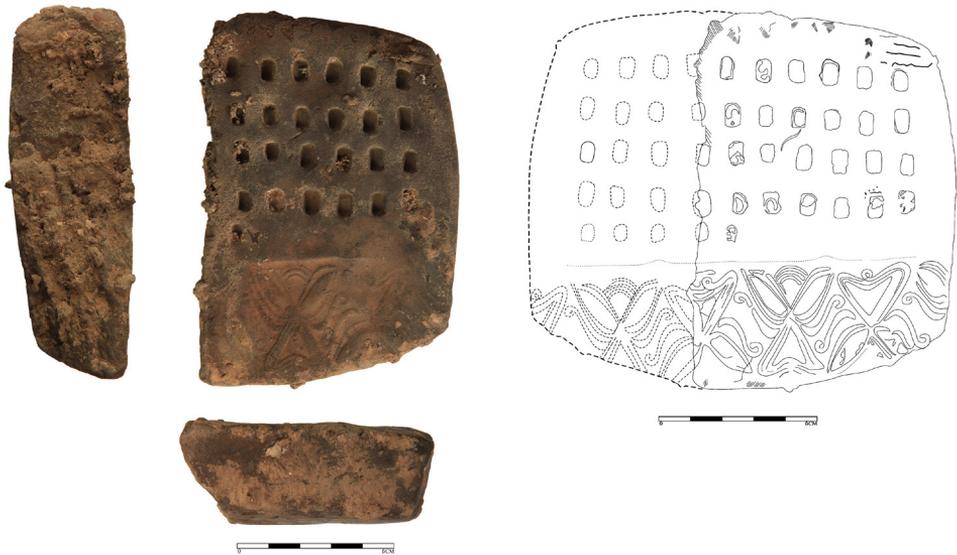


Fig. 7. Proto-Elamite Tablets (Photo by Media Rahmani. Design by Setareh Shahin)

The length of used seal was 4 cm. with a quadrangular flower pattern.

Preliminary observations show that the three parallel lines above the tablet indicate the labor force or possibly the type of goods. Rectangular holes are the number of labor or the amount of goods and the seal impression confirms the above information

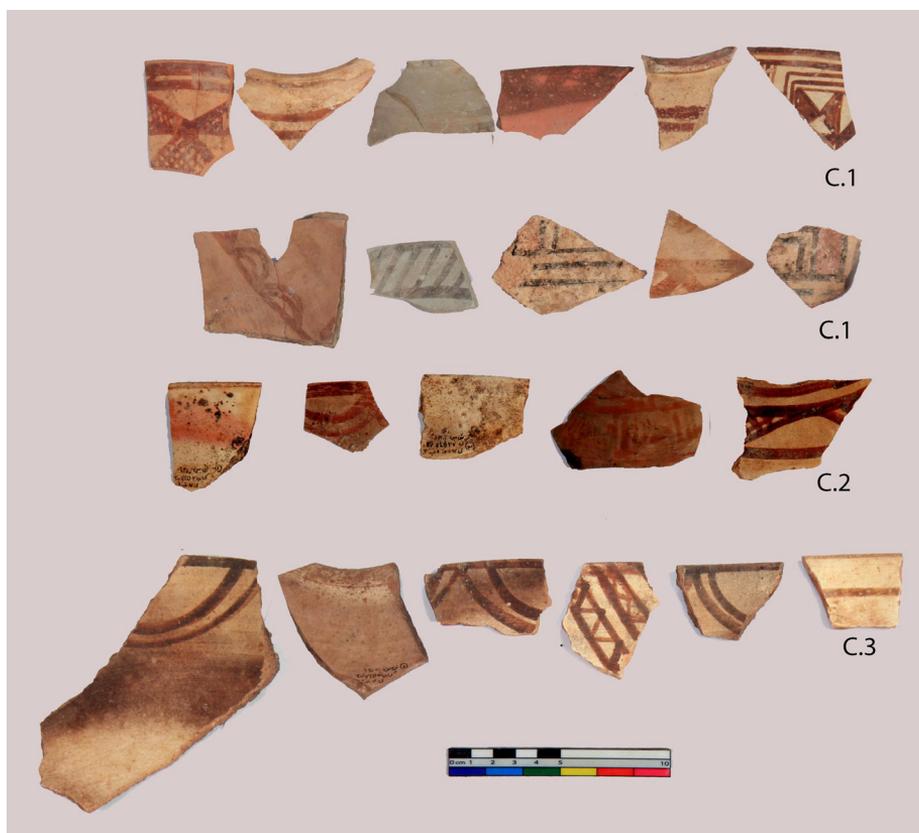


Fig. 8. Layer 8 Pottery

and with most probability was a receipt of goods or an invoice (Fig. 7).

The importance of finding this tablet is that with some exceptions, such as the inscription on the edge of a jar in Shahdad (Hakemi, 1997: Fig. 45), the proto-Elamite tablets of Tepe Yahya (Damerow and Englund 1989), the proto-Elamite tablet of Shahr-i Sokhta (Amiet and Tosi, 1978: Fig. 16) and recent discoveries in Jiroft (Majidzadeh, 1392), in all the eastern parts of the Iranian plateau and neighboring lands such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan, no written texts have been found so far and this is the first case of finding an accounting-related tablet.

Most Layer 8 pottery is smoked. Handmade pottery or pottery made with slow wheel in this layer is more than the upper layers, and most of patterns are those of Shahr-i Sokhta IV (phase 10). A painted buff ware bowl with linear motifs of Namazga III was placed on the floor of this layer (Fig. 8).

Layer 9 has heated orange soil to a depth of 405 cm. Greyish /light gray buff ware pottery is one of the findings of this layer, indicating incomplete baking. The volume of the bones of large animals (probably cows) in this layer is impressive (Fig. 9).

Layer 11 is composed of a gray color soil with an average thickness of 30 cm. on the virgin soil. The amount of pottery and other cultural materials is much less than the upper layers.



Fig. 9. Location of Layers 9 to 11 and Virgin Soil in Room 27

Conclusion

Further analysis of the excavation in Eastern Residential Area requires more time as well as more exploration in this regard, because the excavated areas related to these layers are much less than the large volume of layers of the whole residential area.

Although recent excavations in the Eastern Residential Area of Shahr-i Sokhta, confirm the previous results, but also some points of view related to questions such as the Proto Elamite development in the east, chronological review and a wider understanding of interaction during the formation of Shahr-i Sokhta are not answered yet.

As an example, discovery of new tablet that it has not been seen in any proto historical sites in whole eastern parts of Iranian Plateau, with local traditions to exchange goods raises questions about localism in management practices.

As a result, it can be said briefly that:

- A. Preliminary studies show that Phase 9 was the first stage of cultural development in the southern Hyrmand Delta.
- B. The highest rate of interaction with neighboring areas is seen in Phases 9 and 10 of Period I, which ultimately leads to the creation of a Shahr-i Sokhta style in cultural materials.
- C. The old chronology of Shahr-i Sokhta, according to new excavations, needs to be modified.
- D. The development of Proto-Elamite in Shahr-i Sokhta was very limited and eventually led to the creation of simpler local methods for the exchange of goods and its management.

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