



The Elamite World

Alireza Soleymanzadeh^{*1} and Parviz Hossein Talae²

**Corresponding Author, ¹Department of History, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran.
E-mail: Soleymanzade@lihu.usb.ac.ir*

² Department of History, Shahid Bahonar University, Kerman, Iran.

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The Elamite World is one of the specialized and professional books in the field (Figure 1). It was first published in 2018 by Routledge, part of Taylor & Francis Group, whose publications as a leading publisher champion the knowledge-maker (Figure 2). This one-volume edition has put together the scientific achievements of a group of 40 international specialist scholars in order to present a verifiable, comprehensive, controlled, illustrated, and contemporary account of the Elamite civilization. It contains the complete text of some 41 articles (Figure 3). The Elamite World includes an introduction along with eight parts, which cover a range of various topics such as physical environment, historical development, languages, people, material and spiritual culture, as well as the heritage of Elam in the Achaemenid Empire and its presence in the modern world. Javier Álvarez-Mon¹, Gian Pietro Basello², Yasmina Wicks³, three editors of the volume, are well-thinking and creative scholars who have devoted most of their career to the civilization of Elam.

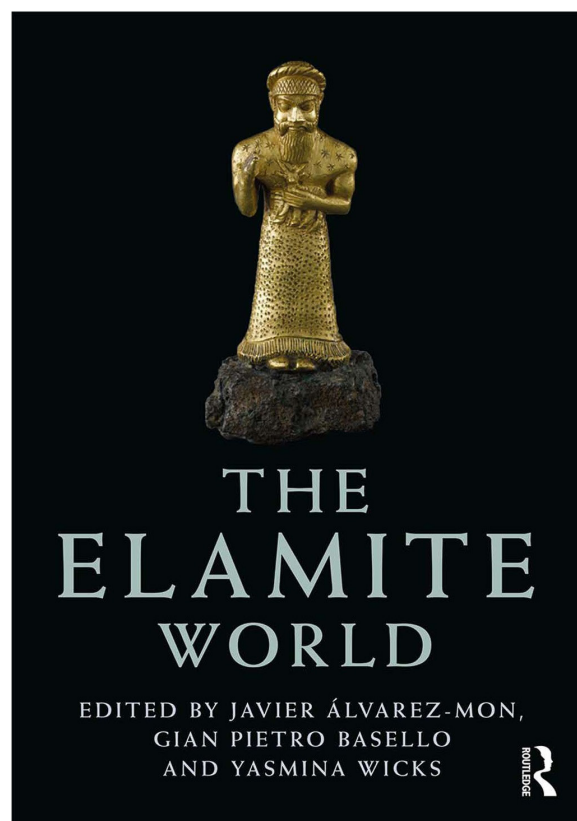


Figure 1: Cover page of the Book

¹Álvarez-Mon, is presently Associate Professor at Macquarie University (Australia). His primary research interests are the ancient Iranian civilizations of Elam and early Achaemenid Persia.

²Basello, PhD in the Ancient Near East 2005, associate professor in Elamite Language, is Tenured Lecturer (2018) at “L’Orientale” University of Naples, Italy where he has been teaching Elamite language since 2010.

³Dr. Wicks (Ph.D. 2017, University of Sydney) is a specialist in the archaeology of ancient Near East. She has several works on the history of Elam.



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Figure 2: Details of the publishing

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Figure 3: Content pages of the Book

There is absolutely no doubt that Elam was one of the highly powerful, long-lasting and advanced civilizations of the Iranian plateau before the arrival of the Aryans. That seems to be why this civilization is both one of the most challenging and most rewarding fields of scholarly endeavor. There is no detailed or accurate information about the earliest history of Elam or how the Elamites established their kingdom for the first time. If one accepts the beginning of the Awan dynasty around 2500 BCE, then about 1800 years of the Iranian history before the consolidation of the Medes kingdom should be devoted to the political history of Elam. Such a historical period requires scholars remarkably patient in pursuing their research objectives. Perhaps one may argue that in modern archaeological-historical scholarship the term Elam conjures up two separate parts of a single reality: 1) the lands that made up the Elamite kingdom and were administered by the Elamite dynasties, and 2) a cultural sphere covering a vast territory outside Elam proper and probably culturally influenced or controlled by Elam. Between 3400–525 BCE, the Elamite civilization was marked by a sort of cultural unity or particular cultural system. For example, the archeological site of “Tapeh Yahya” in Kerman province is a famous multicultural complex of the Proto-Elamite (Period IVC) and dates back to about 3000 BCE. The material culture at Tepeh Yahya (Period IVC) is not limited exclusively to the proto-Elamite component. Rather, it is characterized by elements from other pottery traditions of Central Asia, Mesopotamia, and other regions. *The Elamite World* tries to investigate several issues in light of the evidence obtained from archaeological excavations and surveys in various geographical areas controlled by the Elamite dynasties. In this work, Elam is studied both as a cultural phenomenon and as a political entity ruling over specific lands. Although most of the topics discussed in the volume have focused on the territory under the political control of Elam, its editors believe that, “the various chapters in this volume reveal its cultural boundaries and broader sphere of influence were subject to significant fluctuation over time” (Álvarez-Mon, Basello & Wicks, 2021: 1).

According to the editors, Elam was a “vital,” “dynamic,” and “complex” civilization. In their introduction, they compare it with the two great civilizations that flourished along the Nile and in Mesopotamia. They posit that the new ways of life in these civilizations caused a “big bang” in human interactions, which in turn caused the growth of the social structures, worldview and cognitive space (borders) of the concomitant people. Indeed, they admit that compared to these two civilizations, Elam constitutes one of the most obscure parts of the cultural progress.

As with the volume’s editors, we as the authors of the present review believe that the evidence related to the Elamite civilization span more than three millennia, and for various reasons, Elamitology represents a most ambiguous, complicated, and laborious field. We suppose that the Elamite civilization, while having played a pivotal part in the history of ancient Near East for several thousands of years, has been marginalized and declined in current scholarship. Indeed, the editors point to various problems that most scholars in the field of Elamite studies — as a separate domain of specialization — are facing. They cite many reasons for this: The first is the fact that the study of Elamite civilization is very problematic from the textual and archaeological aspects. From a philologist’s point of view, the Elamite language is inherently difficult because of its lack of effective cognates and has posed insurmountable challenges even to the most dedicated scholars who have attempted to master it. In the meantime, the archaeologist is confronted with a large collection — and in many ways still incomprehensible — of Elamite material culture excavated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries using excavation and recovery methods that were poor even by the standards of that time (Álvarez-Mon, Basello & Wicks, 2021: 2). The second problem is the fake objects that have entered the field of Elamite studies. We believe that counterfeiting and other types of forgery in ancient countries of the world have been practiced for many centuries, and Iran has not been spared from this cultural crisis. The suspicion of the incorporation of forgeries into the Elamite studies makes research difficult for scholars. Since Europeans arrived in Iran to find antiques, especially from the Qajar period onwards, forgery and making counterfeit antiques became popular in Iran. According to the European travelers and a number Iranian writers, the Jews of Iran, especially in the cities of Isfahan and Hamadan, were the most important and active group in making forged coinage and manuscripts (Flandin, 1977: 177–178; Rochechouart, 1999: 18; Holtzer, 1976: 45; Brugsch, 1988: 315; Hardouin, 1945: 33–35).

Yet, there are several other issues that escape the attention of the volume's editors about the complication of Elamitology. It should be borne in mind, coins shed light on the dark events of the past and true coinage began soon after 650 BCE. Herodotus ascribed its invention to the Lydians (Hdt.1.19.1). It must be remembered that, true coinage was absent from Elam until the introduction there of Achaemenid coinage. Meanwhile, a large part of the history of ancient Iran has been illuminated in the shadow of coins (Medd, 2016). Coins are the most valuable illustrated history of an essential part of religion, mythology, economy, art, writing, traditions, industry and politics. What is more, here we don't have sources like those of the ancient Greek authors. Although several thousand inscriptions have been discovered from Elam, of course they have inherent limitations and epigraphy cannot reveal all the things happened in history.

In addition to these problems, the editors point to three specific attitudes towards the history of Elam, which have undoubtedly contributed to the lack of scientific and public interest in studies related to this civilization: the geographical location of Elam, Aryanism and silencing the history of non-Aryan races of Iran, and the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty are among the three factors mentioned in the book. According to the editors of the book, the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979 had a "heavy toll" on Elamite studies (Álvarez-Mon, Basello & Wicks, 2021: 2). One cannot ignore this assertion by the editors. Even Professor R. N. Frye (1920–2014) has pointed out the terrible impact of Pahlavi's fall in 1979 on Iranian studies. He says that after this event interests of the new government in Iran in the field of Iranology has decreased. In the end, Fry laments why Iranian studies should be tied to the splurge of the Pahlavi government and breathe with the money that came from Iran. As a result, when the injection of government donative funds suddenly stopped, so has also stopped Iranology and learning the Farsi language abroad¹.

As mentioned before, *The Elamite World* splits into eight parts. The first part, "Imagining Elam: The History of Research and its Sources," consists of five chapters. This part contains some introductory remarks, and probably is a quite interesting attempt to show what tremendous developments have taken place from the starting point of Elamite studies to the present time. It is supposed to determine what works have been done and published in the desired field and which part of Elam's history needs more inquiry. Clarifying conflicting results in past research, and familiarizing the reader with existing texts are other advantages of this part of the book. The first chapter of part I is "Elam in Western Scholarship from the Renaissance to the Late 19th Century" by Daniel T. Potts. The ensuing three chapters are entitled "Elam and the Bible," "France and Elam," and "Between Orientalism and Persomania," written respectively by Peter Dubovský, Nicole Chevalier, and Marianne Cotty. The last chapter of this part is "Elamite Forgeries and the Antiquities Market" written by Oscar White Muscarella. "The Lie Became Great: The Forgery of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures" is the name of a book previously published by Muscarella in 2000. Perhaps the contents of this article are most interesting for those Iranians who are looking for enough reasons or documentation for the Islamization of Humanities and consider Western knowledge to lack the necessary objectivity. According to such anti-western stream, orientalist and archaeologists such as R. Ghirshman, I. Goldziher, L. Vandenberghe, E.E. Herzfeld, R. Schmitt, and etc., as well as their Iranian versions were all of Jewish origin, and therefore a part of ancient Iranian materials are deemed forgeries made by Western-Jewish orientalists.

The title of the second part is "The Land and Peoples of Elam." This part of the work, with articles from scholars such as Petrie, Djamali, Jones, Helwing, Zadok, and Tavernier, deals with geography, Metals, The peoples of Elam, etc. The influence of geography on civilization is undeniable. Even the followers of the geographical determinism school, such as Friedrich Ratzel, E. Huntington, Henry T. Buckle, and Edwin Exeter, have tried to tie the rise and fall of civilizations to geographical factors (Chakoui, 1970: 150–152). Of course, this part of the book does not follow geographical determinism, and realistically seek to study the role of various geographical factors in the formation of the civilization of Elam.

In the third part, with standard, discrete, and named blocks of time, the scholars study the various stages of Elam's political history by ordering and identifying chronological sequences. A kind of well-known time periodization in order to understand the historical processes of Elam.

"Close encounters on the eastern and western fronts" is the name given to the fourth part. Here, for example, the relations between Elam, and the neighboring civilizations, especially Babylonia under the Kassite dynasty (Elam under the Ighalkids, and the Šutrukids), relations with Assyria, and also subjects related to the eastern territory of Elam are discussed.

¹Interview with Richard N. Frye, Foundation for Iranian Studies, by Vali Nasr, Boston, April 25, 1989.

In the fifth part of the book, seven important articles by scholars such as Denise Schmandt-Besserat, Jacob L. Dahl, François Desset, and other researchers can be found in which, for instance, Elamite language, and writing (The proto-Elamite, and Linear Elamite writing) are discussed in detail. The Elamite script, and language, like many other complex Elamite issues, is one of the topics that are addressed here.

“The material culture of Elam” is the sixth part of the work. Elamite architecture, ceramics, the metal arts, the sculptural arts, and glyptic, dress, and textiles, and other issues about civilization are studied here by scholars such as Behzad Mofidi-Nasrabadi, Bernadette K. McCall, Holly Pittman, Mark B. Garrison.

The seventh part of the book contains five articles that study society and spiritual culture under the title of “Elamite Society.” Spiritual culture includes cuneiform culture, and science, calendars, metrology, religion and art in Elam. We can never judge a book based on its cover, but what stands out in the table of contents of this book is that despite the fact that scholars have known Elam for more than a century, we do not have much new information about the origin of the ancient civilization of Elam, its precise relations with other civilizations of the neighboring regions such as the Mesopotamia, and its effectiveness, impact or influence, on the pre-Achaemenid civilizations (such as on the Medes, Kassites (Cassians), Mannaeans, Gutians, Lullubians, Mitannians and the Ellipians). Even the final continuity of the Elamite culture in different parts of later civilizations has not yet been determined precisely.

The final part of this book is divided into three main sections, and deals with “The Legacy of Elam.” Undoubtedly, the Achaemenids were under the direct influence of Elamite civilization. We can see this influence in many aspects of material and spiritual culture, such as clothing, script, writing, ethics, art, architecture, economy, religion, bureaucracy, and political system. Its Political, and Military failures, or being under Achaemenid rule did not prevent the historical continuity of Elam. “Elamite administrative and religious heritage in the Persian heartland”, “The Elamite Artistic Heritage of Persia,” and “Elam in Achaemenid studies” are three articles in part VIII written by Henkelman, Álvarez-Mon, and Rossi, respectively.

Conclusions

The book reviewed here talks about a large world called Elam. The ancient artifacts obtained from this area show a kind of cultural continuity and a flourishing civilization during the Bronze Age. The book’s name can reveal its true nature, its essence, its factual aspects and even its destiny. The Elamite World is a part of the universe history and this type of naming was already used by Walther Hinz under the title of “The lost world of Elam.” Although Elam was not an empire, the volume *The Elamite World* tries to show a clear picture of a great civilization. Ripe scholars have gathered together in this book to objectively show the greatness and magnificence of the Elamite civilization to the present world. The Khuzestan plain is a wide and flat area that generally has little height. Various factors, for example situation on the navigable Tigris river, and the ease of communication between different Elamite regions to name but a few, made Elam able to easily communicate with the cultural centers along the Tigris. Such features contributed to a unified culture in Khuzestan. Perhaps this cultural integration has been the foremost factor responsible for harmonizing studies in the wider identification of Elamite civilization in the current era.

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