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NEO-LITHICS 1/16
The Newsletter of Southwest Asian Neolithic Research
On several occasions we co-editors of Neo-Lithics have discussed a peer-reviewed and open access format of the newsletter, encouraged by repeated appeals from our colleagues to provide a publication opportunity that also serves the need to promote careers, e.g. by collecting impact points. We hesitated: We didn’t want to be just another peer-review network, with problems in transparency, with manipulation opportunities by selecting reviewers, for helping mainstream research topics and strategies, and the like. Knowing our capacities, we also wanted to avoid the immense administrative and moral work related to the organization of peer reviews. Rather we wanted to continue being a 1) direct gate to quickly publish information on important new findings from the Neolithic fields and labs with just a lighter editor-based reviewing, 2) an alternative for Neolithic topics not easily placed in other journals, 3) a place for field reports often considered not reviewable, and 4) especially a chance for young researchers – especially from the Middle East - outside existing research networks to launch their first publications under less severe conditions, to promote regional expertise. How to maintain these goals when introducing peer review?

The discussion is still ongoing and we seek your comments, advice, and collaboration. We can imagine to be an open access newsletter by applying testable standards of transparency, organizing a non-anonymous peer reviewing for our sections Field Reports and Contributions while keeping the “documentary” sections of reports on conferences, news on books and thesis, etc. unreviewed. Our sorrow is, however, that this might lead to the exclusion of worthy information presented by younger colleagues who do not meet advanced standards of research presentation and analysis. But this might become the chance for another type of reviewing, understanding it as coaching authors and raising the discursive levels of contributions by adding - in one way or another - the reviewers’ points of view? By reaching high quality contributions through strong acceptance hurdles, resulting from an intense transparent negotiation of results between the author and sponsoring or even nursing non-anonymous reviewers, we can make peer reviewing in Neo-Lithics an interactive motor for high quality Neolithic research, and an investment into the academic offspring as well. It would mean that we would need a much larger community of peer reviewers (or peer coaches), ready to be committed to this future format of Neo-Lithics. It even can result in a paradigm of another type and culture of peer review. Is this idea beyond academic reality, too much idealistic or even naïve?

Upon the publication of this editorial, we will launch this discussion also into the mailing list Forum Neo-Lithics, to open a broader discussion on a potential change of the Neo-Lithics format.

The co-editors Hans Georg K. Gebel, Marion Benz, Dörte Rokitta-Krumnow, joined by Gary Rollefson.
The 10th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE) was held in Vienna, Austria from 25th to 29th, April, 2016. Eight sections and 27 workshops were organized in the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology which belongs to the Austrian Academy of Sciences and gathered many archaeologists and specialists from numerous nationalities.

In the last two days of the conference, from 28th to 29th, April, Jörg Becker, Bernd Müller-Neuhof from the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung in Berlin and Claudia Beuger from the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Seminar für Orientalische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte in Halle organized a Workshop entitled “Iconography and Symbolic Meaning of the Human in Near Eastern Prehistory”. The workshop aimed to highlight new field research on the human representation in ancient Near Eastern prehistory, attempting to provide further and new interpretation on issues like “fertility cult”, “god representation”, etc.

16 participants from 9 countries took part in the two-days workshop; 19 lectures were presented in English in three sections: 1 “Symbolism and Iconography”, 2 “Physical Anthropology and Mortuary Practises”, and 3 “Self-perception and Self-expression of the Human Being”. Both days of the workshop were attended by a large audience.

The first section, “Symbolism and Iconography” included five lectures (T. Watkins’ only read) was devoted to human representations (figurines, paintings, engraving or reliefs on ceramics) from the Natufian period throughout the Early Chalcolithic. The lectures discussed the diversity of the human representations in a diachronic and a regional way, and the difficulties of interpreting these objects often found in secondary contexts. Another issue of discussion was that human representations were often found intentionally broken, as in Göbekli Tepe where human stone heads were found buried at the foot of the pillars. Lectures also tried to question the possible use of this human representation for domestic ceremonies or activities.

The second part, “Physical anthropology and mortuary practises”, presented a lot of lectures on human remains from the sites of Basta, Lidar Höyük, Uyyun el-Hamman, ‘Ayn Qasiyya, Boncuklu, Wadi Faynan 16, Körtik Tepe and Jericho, among others. In this part, authors talked about the treatment of the dead which differs by time and region. Indeed, some of the dead are buried under the floor of the houses while others are buried in a dedicated “cemetery”, as in Uyyun el-Hamman in Jordan. As far as that goes, in Boncuklu, Turkey, some of the dead were buried under the houses and some of the others were buried in external spaces, even in the garbage. Isotopic study showed that the
two populations came from different locations, and that there is a selection of the dead according to their origin. This result drove several authors to question the possible differences of the status of individuals. The question of the adornment and grave goods was also raised, because it is often difficult to distinguish between real grave goods and what D. Baird called “background noise” (objects present in the sediment but not necessarily associated with the burial/dead). The post-depositional treatment of the human remains was particularly treated in the lecture by Yilmaz Erdal on the human remains from Körtik Tepe. These bones show a lot of intentional cut marks, painting with ochre or black pigment and covered with plaster. These treatments indicate either interpersonal violence or special burial rituals.

Finally, the third part of the workshop, “Self-perception and Self-expression of the Human Being”, attempted to question the nature of the human representations, and how the human perceives his “beyond”. The figurines, sometimes painted or engraved (representing either clothes or tattoos), show us how the human understood her- or himself. Plastered skulls which seem to have been repaired several times suggest a specific use of these representations, maybe for a longer period. B. Müller-Neuhof proposed for figurines in South-Western Asia an apotropaic use as a magical substitute for pregnancy and delivery. And finally, the question of the link between human representation and mortuary practices was raised for the site of Dja’de el-Mughara, where nearly all of the dead for the last phase were buried in a specific building, a “house of the dead”.

Of course, the workshop could only approach and not answer all of these questions, but it succeeded in providing new interpretation lines and questions for the various meanings of human representation in the Near East. Exchanges between the lecturers were extremely interesting, as was the exchange with the audience, indicating the high quality of communications and related debates.

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Becker, Jörg /Beuger, Claudia / Müller-Neuhof, Bernd:
Introduction

Part I: Symbolism and Iconography
Watkins, Trevor: When do human representations become superhuman agents? (read contribution)
Conard, Nicholas / Mohsen, Zeidi: Continuity and discontinuity between Paleolithic and Neolithic imagery
Clare, Lee / Dietrich, Oliver / Notroff, Jens: Anthropomorphic iconography at Göbekli Tepe
Nieuwenhuys, Olivier: To see or to touch? The sensual context of prehistoric human imagery
Becker, Jörg: Anthropomorphic figurines of the Halaf Period

Part 2: Physical anthropology and mortuary practise
Schultz, Michael: Health and disease in the prehistoric and early historical Near East. A contribution to the reconstruction of ancient living conditions
Belfer-Cohen, Anna / Goring-Morris, Nigel: Epipalaeolithic mortuary customs in Southwest Asia
Baird, Douglas: Boncuklu Bodies
Finlayson, Bill: PPN mortuary patterns, archaeological models, people and society
Erdal, Yılmaz: Post-depositional treatment of dead at Körtik Tepe: Symbolic and social implication
Fletcher, Alexandra: Changing faces, from individual to ancestor: a plastered skull from Jericho

Part 3: Self-perception and Self-expression of the Human Being
Biehl, Peter: Forming and transforming the human body in the Near Eastern Neolithic and Chalcolithic
Chamel, Bérénice / Coqueugniot, Eric: Human self-perception and self-expression in the Early Neolithic of North Levant: Funerary practices and symbolic meaning of the human representations in Dja’de, Syria
Müller-Neuhof, Bernd: Signals from the past: gestures in SW-Asian anthropomorphic iconography – preliminary observations
Beuger, Claudia: Clothing and nudity in prehistoric Near East
Drabsh, Bernadette: Nude, robed and masked processions: Considering the figural images in the Teleilat Ghassul wall paintings
Molist, Miquel / Ortiz, Anabel / Gomez Bach, Anna: Symbolic documents in Euphrates Valley in the Middle and Late PPNB. Results of the Tell Halula Project in interpretative context (read contribution)
Campbell, Stuart: Treatment and representation of humans in the later prehistory of Northern Mesopotamia: integrating approaches
Unlike the 1960-70s during which spectacular excavations took place across Iran the succeeding stagnation in research brought the country out of the focus of Near Eastern Neolithic research.

However, important research progress was made again in recent years, and new interdisciplinary approaches enriched previous information. New evidence on Neolithic Iran is flourishing, and results request more excavated data in future. In 2010, a workshop on the Iranian Neolithic was organized by Roger Matthews and Hassan Fazeli Nashli during the the 7th ICAANE in the British Museum in London, published in 2013 (Matthews and Fazeli 2013); it was followed by another overview on the Iranian Neolithic by Roustaei and Mashkour (2016). The international conference Neolithisation and its Consequences: A Global View (from and to Iran) held at the University of Tehran, is the most recent enterprise for an overview, concentrating on a wider geographical perspective on the diversity of Neolithisation in Iran. The discussion involved areas as far as Europe and the Pontic region though Iran’s important role in the Neolithisation processes became clear enough. During two days, 20 papers were presented at the Bastani Parizi Hall, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran (Figs. 1 and 2). The topics were ordered according to two major public sessions: Evidences of Neolithisation in Iran (1st day) and Global Neolithisation Processes in Adjacent Near East and Europe (2nd day). Two more days were devoted to visits of Neolithic sites on the Tehran and Kashan plains..

Four brief lectures presented by Hassan Fazeli Nashli and Judith Thomalsky (the conference organizers), Hamideh Choubak (Head of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research/ ICAR), and Hosein Ali Ghobadi (Head of the Research Center for Humanities and Cultural Studies of Iran) opened and introduced the conference.

An impressing, impulse-giving paper (‘Worldwide Research Perspectives for the Shift of Human Societies from Mobile to Settled Ways of Life’) was presented by Roger Matthews (University of Reading). He discussed basic issues such as the worldwide heartlands of domestication and agricultural dispersals and emphasized on the importance of the major driving factors, the ‘Hows’ and ‘Whys’ of Neolithisation. He presented an overview on the theoretical backgrounds, such as the Oasis-and-Hilly-Flanks model and on the new evi-
dence from aDNA research and other methods. In this respect, and to address the dispersal of Neolithic life modes, for instance, it is believed that male farmers might have migrated from the Near East to Europe and ‘married’ local women. A strong attention should now be given to palaeoclimatology as an important area of research. All in all, he emphasized that Neolithisation was a long-lasting while very heterogenic set of processes, and not a single event, both to in the global and the niche perspectives.

The Iranian session was started by Hamed Vahdati Nasab (Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran) who talked about ‘The Transition from Paleolithic to the Neolithic on the Central Plateau’. After his outline of a methodological-theoretical framework, Vahdati Nasab presented the Paleolithic occupation in the region and concluded that at the end of the Paleolithic development the Neolithic substratum was provided by a climatic optimum. This horizon, the Epipaleolithic, must be understood as the period of adaptation to the environments both in terms of subsistence and technology. But the archaeological record still exhibits a major problem: Although the Central Plateau of Iran hosted some Epipaleolithic occupations, no site with Early Neolithic remains has yet been discovered. Cave-sites such as Komishan showed no evidence of domestication, while the earliest fully domestic species come from Sang-e Chakhmagh West. Although aDNA analyses indicate a sort of spreading Neolithic lifestyles into the region, ‘cultural adaptability’ seems to have played a major role in this regard.

Hojjat Darabi (Razi University, Kermanshah) gave a summary in his talk of ‘The Earliest Steps towards the Neolithic World in Western Iran’ on the very earliest evidences of Neolithic processes in Iran. By the end of the Younger Dryas, temperature and precipitation increased in Western Iran and, therefore, plants and trees increasingly grew in this area. This basically provided longer occupations at one spot which became one major factor for population increase. While environmental resources were intensively exploited and came under pressure by the people, some species such as emmer, barley, lentil and goats were regularly grown in some communities. This discussion is mostly based on the recent evidence from Chogha Golan, Chia Sabz East, and Sheikh-e Abad. However, it is believed that not only subsistence changed from foraging to farming during the ‘Transitional Neolithic’ (c. 9,500-8,000 BC), but also technologies/innovations such as the emergence of grinding stones or the ‘Pre-M’lefatian chipped stone industry’ simultaneously became dominant. This could indicate that western Iran was a Neolithisation center of its own right.

‘North-eastern Iran During the Neolithic’ was discussed by Omran Garazhian (University of Neishapur). He applied the term ‘Jeitun - Sang-e Chakhmagh Culture’ and described the sites in terms of pottery and architecture, with an emphasis on Qaleh Khan and Tall-e Atashi. It is understood that both insufficient fieldwork and geomorphological factors – such as erosion and unstable sandy landscape – are responsible for the little knowledge we have on the Neolithic occupations in eastern Iran.

Roger Matthews spoke of ‘The Neolithisation of the Eastern Fertile Crescent: New Evidence from the Zagros’, and stressed the contextual and social approaches in investigating the Neolithisation processes, and – tackling his recent excavations in Iranian Zagros and Iraqi Kurdistan – aimed at an examination of the role of local ecosystems in domestication in a way that goats initially became domestic in the Zagros Highlands, spreading from here to lower lands such as northern Iraq and southwestern Iran.

Abbas Alizadeh (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago) gave an all-out talk by using the conference title ‘Neolithisation and its Consequences in Early Neolithic times: a Global Perspective (from and to Iran)’. He emphasized the territoriality in the Neolithic period and that social change is poorly documented in Iranian Neolithic. After a brief discussion on the Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic period in the Central Plateau, he focused on the Neolithic sites in lowland Khuzestan, southwestern Iran. Noteworthy is the heavy sedimentation of the region that makes the detection of Neolithic sites almost impossible. Alizadeh believes that regional communication networks were formed from the early 6th millennium cal BC onwards, and that earlier settlements should be considered with regard to ‘territoriality’.

The “Southern Zagros During the Neolithic Period” was discussed by Hossein Azizi Kha ranaghi (Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation) who highlighted the different landscapes and the research history of the region. The presentation mainly focused on the regional chronology by which some sites were discussed. In this regard, the Proto-Neolithic/Tang-e Bolagh Phase (c. 10,000-7,400 cal BC),

Fig. 2 Contributors and audience of the conference at the Bastani Parizi Hall, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran. (photo courtesy of H. Fazeli)
the Pre-pottery Neolithic/ Rahmatabad Phase (c. 7,400-7,000 cal BC), and the Pottery Neolithic Phase (c. 7,000-5,200 cal BC) were distinguished. Based on ceramic styles, the Pottery Neolithic was divided into three sub-phases: Early/ Formative Mushki (c. 7,000-6,350 BC), Middle/ Mushki (c. 6,350-6,000 cal BC), and Late/ Jari- Bashi-Shamsabad (c. 6,000-5,200 cal BC). In particular, excavations at Tapeh Rahmatabad and Qasr-e Ahmad shed light on the Neolithisation of southern Iran. At Rahmatabad, the chipped stone industry indicates a M’lefatian tradition. Furthermore, a change from hunting/gathering to farming is attributed to the site. In general, the Neolithic might have rooted in the Central Zagros, spreading from here to southern Iran by the diffusion of new ideas.

The Northern Central Plateau of Iran was discussed by Hassan Fazeli Nashli (University of Tehran). His presentation entitled “Caspian Sea and Central Iranian Plateau: Data in Comparison” mostly concentrated on new evidence provided by some Neolithic sites on the Tehran, Kashan and Qazvin Plains. The sites such as Sialk North, Pardis, Chahar Boneh, and Ebrahimabad were debated in the light of their dates, architecture, pottery, burial and botanical/ zoological remains. Cremation was identified at Sialk North. The sites have been re-occupied during post-Neolithic times, usually covered by later deposits. It is stated that the lack of PPN settlements seems to result from deep sedimentation of the plains.

‘Neolithic Data from Northwestern Iran’ was presented by Bahram Ajjorloo (Tabriz Islamic Art University). Arjoloo’s discussion concentrated on the role of a ‘climatic playa stage’ prior to c. 7,000 cal BC, and that the region was environmentally uninhabitable until the late 7th millennium cal BC when settlements such as Ahranjan and Qreh Tapeh were established. It was stated that the earliest Neolithic settlements in northwestern Iran emerged as a result of migration from the Central Zagros. However, petrographic analysis proved the local origin of the Neolithic pottery. Like the Central Plateau, northwestern Iran suffers from the lack of PPN sites.

Genetic analysis and its role in better understanding the Neolithisation was pointed out by Javad Hossein-zadeh (Kashan University). His lecture ‘Neolithic of Iran and the Contribution of Archaeogenetics’ began with a general discussion on new excavations in the Central Zagros, a chronological debate, and the topic of previous genetic analysis on goats. The rest of the presentation concentrated on recent analyses done on samples taken from three Neolithic sites (Chahar Boneh, Sialk North, and Ebrahimabad) on the Northern Central Plateau. The results showed that the goat samples attribute to southeastern Turkey, possibly meaning that domestic goats were brought from there to the Central Iranian Plateau and from here to southeastern Iran. However, this idea requires further data.

By the end of the first day, as the session on Iran finished, Judith Thomalsky summarized the presentations and emphasized on the importance of current data and on the issues still needing future discussion. In the evening, contributors paid a visit to the Iranology Foundation where the Museum of Iranian Ethnology and a picture-gallery attracted them.

During the second day, Neolithisation was approached from broader geographical contexts, including Syria, Turkey, Jordan and Europe. In addition, as illustrated by the following report, palaeoclimatology was more a subject.

Giving attention to a large region, Dominik Fleitman (University of Reading, UK) presented ‘The Context of Neolithisation: Paleo-climates of Iran and the Middle East during the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene’. He started with a brief look at present climate of the Middle East, understanding that it is mostly influenced by mid-latitude subtropical high pressure systems, and, in this respect, Iran is located between the northern Atlantic and southern monsoon climate systems. Based on available information provided by various methods and sources, such as lake-bed palynology, carbon isotope and cave stalagmite analyses, the transition from late Epipaleolithic to early Neolithic was illustrated by climate data. Based on some evidence from Turkey and the Mediterranean, the two dry cold climatic events (9.2 and 8.2 Kya) during the early Holocene were discussed; it was argued that these should be taken into account by Iranian archaeology in future. For this, continuous records and precise chronologies are the main requirements for meaningful future research.

Fig. 3 The organizers present the conclusions and achievements of the conference. (photo courtesy of H. Fazeli)
Micro-morphological analysis was the central theme of the lecture given by Wendy Matthews (University of Reading) on the ‘Early Built Environments and Settled life in the Neolithic of the Central Zagros’. She discussed the change from seasonality to year-round occupations in the early Neolithic Zagros through her analyses of samples taken in Sheikh-e Abad and Jani in western Iran and Bestansur and Shimshara in northern Iraq. In this regard, different functional loci inside the houses were identified.

The discussion then led to the north of the Black Sea or the Pontic region by Norbert Benecke (DAI Berlin) who presented ‘Archaeozoological Studies on the Mesolithic - Neolithic Transition in the Pontic Region’. He reminded on some characteristics related to animal domestication, and went into the region by means of zooarchaeology. Showing zooarchaeological investigations at some Neolithic sites, it is concluded that the principal animal species (goats, sheep, cattle and pig) were not domesticated locally, and that fully-domestic animals spread from c. 6,500 cal BC.

Karlin Bartl (DAI, Damascus Branch) explained ‘Neolithic Developments in Syria’. At first, the Syrian landscape and research backgrounds were discussed. The chronological debate and the archaeological indicators of each Neolithic (sub-) period were discussed by the presentation of key sites such as Abu Hurayra, Jerf-al Ahmar, ‘Abr, lower Qaramel, Halula, Ramad, and Abyad. Then, the earliest Neolithic pottery was presented, from sites like Bouqras. Lastly, the place of the Halaf culture within Late Syrian Neolithic was reviewed. It was stated that, based on the archaeological evidence, the numbers of settlements increased by the Pottery Neolithic.

Mehmet Özdoğan (University of Istanbul) presented ‘The Neolithic Cultures in Turkey’. The lecture began with the idea that no suitable sites with late Epipaleolithic to early Neolithic deposits have yet been found in Turkey; however, recent investigations showed occupations dating back to the 10th millennium cal BC onwards. The transition from round to rectili-

Fig. 4 Several Neolithic sites were visited (Tapeh Cheshmeh Ali is seen in the background). (photo courtesy of H. Fazeli)
In his concluding talk, Friedrich Lüth, as the representative of Research Cluster 1 (From Hunter to Sedentism) of the DAI that was involved in the organisation of this conference, invited the participants to publish the papers presented in the conference. Lastly, he re-emphasized some important topics, such as the role of coastal zones in Neolithisation of Southern Iran to be addressed in future.

The next two days were devoted to field trips to visit some Neolithic sites on the Tehran and Kashan Plains (Fig. 4), mainly Tapeh Cheshmeh Ali south of Tehran and Tapeh Sialk near Kashan. Hassan Fazeli Nashli, who directed excavations at both sites, guided the site tours, highlighting the importance and archaeological implications of these Neolithic sites on the Northern Central Plateau of Iran.

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