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HOMENAJE AL DR. ANTONINO GONZÁLEZ BLANCO

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Alejandro Egea Vivancos
José Javier Martínez García
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(Coords.)

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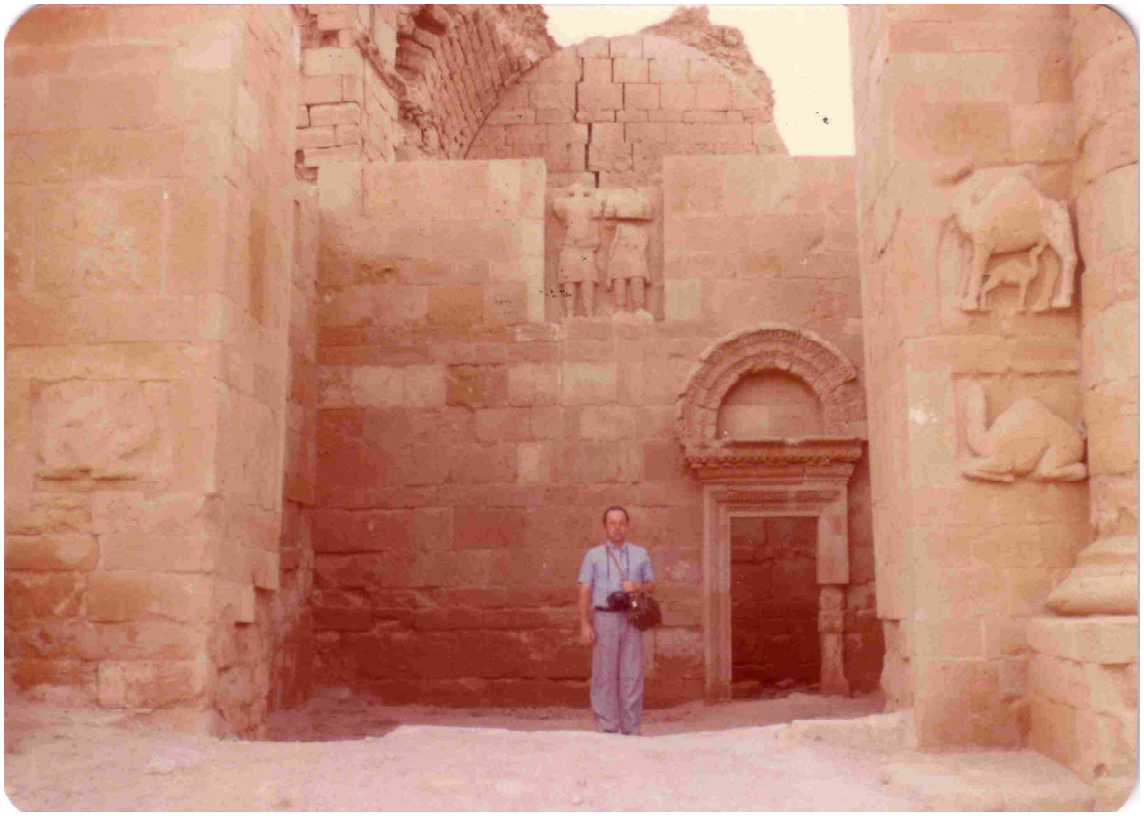
Dr. González Blanco en Tera (Creta). 1979.



Dr. González Blanco en Hatra (Iraq). 1979.

Prof. Cors y prof. González Blanco en el acto de inauguración de la creación del IPOA de la Universidad de Murcia. Enero 2001.

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Aspects of Elamite art and religious ideology: The rock-cut sanctuary of Kūrangūn and Aesthetics of the Natural Environment

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Most people are on the world, not in it—have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them—undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate (John Muir, John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir, 1938)

1. Introduction

The field of Near Eastern art history has greatly evolved since the days where collectors of antiquities and "gentleman" scholars assumed the aptitude to express the beautiful feelings evoked by a work of art. Its scholarly foundations —which began with the systematic task of analyzing and classifying elements of style very often with the sole purpose of dating the object chronologically— have expanded in tandem with the ability to compare elements in visual media with textual information. As a result, there has been an increased awareness to the organic nature of the artifact and the inseparability of the economic, religious, and social aspects of an artwork.

The general significance of this topic narrows slightly when assessing the interaction between artistic (or aesthetic) and religious environments[2]. The history of this interaction can be summarized by two models of understanding: the primary model conceives a hierarchy of meaning with the character of artistic production determined by religious ideology[3]. A secondary model expresses this relationship in response to the former and, instead, stresses the secular character of an artwork[4]. More recently, the nature of this relationship has taken a twist in the hand of Irene Winter (1995). The author refines the distinctiveness of Mesopotamian aesthetics by positing a critical difference between means and ends. Accordingly, the primary role of art (apparently never an end in itself) was to serve as a *pathway* (my emphasis) embedded with emotional response for encountering the divine. More importantly, what is distinctive about Mesopotamian tradition, suggests Winter (1995: 2575), "is the degree to which aesthetic and emotional responses are closely intertwined and the degree to which the sacred seems to manifest through visually affective, hence aesthetic, qualities". These insights, in my opinion, remove the subject of emphasis from the independent, hierarchical, and *ultimate* attributes of an artwork (whether religious or secular in nature) and force examination

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2 This article does not support distinction between *aesthetics* (from Greek aesthesis) addressing the role of bodily sensation (feeling and emotion) and *art* defined as the intellectual pursuit of value (and the notion of educated taste). Instead, both terms will be used interchangeably as there is no evidence indicating that such a division existed in the ancient Near East.

3 To the authors of the 1884 *Histoire de L'Art dans L'Antiquité*: "En tout pays, la plus haute fonction de l'art, c'est de traduire, par des formes sensibles, l'idée que l'homme se fait du divin" (Perrot and Chipiez, vol. II, 1884: 59).

4 For instance, H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort (1987: 170) supported contrasting views to those espoused by Edith Porada (1986) when she suggested that the Neo-Assyrian battle scene reliefs of the time of Ashurnasirpal II had a primarily secular character. Porada also suggests the "standard" of Ur, and the Naram-Sin stele had an ultimate religious character.

of the actual *pathway/s* by means of which the dynamic intertwining of religion and art takes place. In other words, by highlighting pathway/s there is implied relocation of emphasis from the *what* into the *how*; as a direct result, the scholar is challenged to re-invent narrative disclosing aspects of the rational embedded in the mechanics of the creative process.

In the following pages I will follow this rationale and interrogate the notion of *pathways* from the viewpoint of Elamite art. Most particularly, the specific purpose of this exercise is to query a neglected area of studies, namely: the relationship between art and the natural environment. The field of environmental aesthetics has emerged as a significant branch of art and philosophical theory seeking to determine how natural and artificial environments instigate aesthetic appreciation[5]. It also seeks to challenge the notion that the natural environment cannot be the subject of aesthetic appreciation because it is not the product of culture (that is: created by and appealing to the imagination)[6].

In concrete terms, claiming aesthetic agency for the natural environment suggests that localized landscape features such as caves, rivers, trees, lakes, or mountains can be the source affective qualities which engage attention, emotion, and imagination and hence are bound in time to specific cultural sensibilities[7]. From this nature oriented perspective, for instance, it is of interest to investigate how interaction with specific features found in the natural landscape have determined experiences of wonder and fostered the creation of artistic and religious ideology in the arts of the ancient Near East, in general, and of Elam, in particular[8].

5 For the genesis of this movement and the profound shift in sensibilities that occurred in the West (and most particularly in England) between the 16th and late 18th centuries see the commanding analysis of Keith Thomas (1983); for a brief philosophical introduction see G. Graham (1997: 168-175); A. Berlean and A. Carlson (1998); Allen Carlson (2002); and Emily Brady (2003).

6 Aesthetic value is here to be understood in the visually affective mode determined by I. Winter. Hence, emphasis on the positive reception of nature has direct implication on the supposed autonomy of the art object and the relationship between nature and culture. According to Berlean and Carlson (1998: 98) "environmental aesthetics is a bridge between traditional forms of aesthetic appreciation and the recognition of significant aesthetic value in other domains conventionally excluded from the fine arts".

7 A telling example of the complex relationship between caves, a river source, and art is provided by the so-called "source" of the Tigris River. The source is linked to the spectacular natural topography of the Birkleyn caves and was the subject of celebrated visits (some of which were accompanied by inscribed reliefs and textual accounts) by Akkadian and Neo-Assyrian rulers. For the stone tablet found at Nineveh mentioning Naram-Sîn sending an expedition to the source of the Tigris and Euphrates see Gelb and Kienast (1990: 5-14); for the Neo-Assyrian period see A.T. Shafer (1998), A. Schachner (2004), Ö. Harmanşah (2007). For more on the symbolic and sublime dimensions of caves, the "divine road of the mountain", see the Hittite parallels discussed by Hawkins (1998). Incidentally, perhaps the best documented literary passage related to the significance of caves as a passage-way leading to the edge of the world comes straight from the Epic of Gilgameš, "the darkness is dense, and light was there none…" (George 1999: 73-74; Table IX, viiff).

8 Within the archaeological and textural context of the ancient Near East I direct the reader to the 44th RAI dedicated to *Landscapes, Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East* (Milano, Martino, Fales and Lanfranchi 2000). Within the specific topic of landscape representation the works of H. Kantor (1966) and, most recently, I. Winter (2000) provide exceptional insights in the matter. Kantor, stresses the evolution on treatment of landscape during the Akkadian period. For the first time, landscape emerges as an independent feature centred on itself; this is interpreted as an indication of a change on the experiential sensibilities of the Akkadians ("Akkadian deep feeling for nature"; Kantor 1966: 152) and the result of the expansionistic policies that took the low-land Akkadians to the eastern highlands, the homelands of the Gutti, Awanites, and Elamites (an interaction, by the way, which remains to be thoroughly investigated and which, in my opinion, frames discussions on the surge of Akkadian naturalistic interest for the highlands and the assumed influence of Egyptian artistic models; see I. Winter 2000: 64, nt. 9). I. Winter's analysis of the mountainous landscape (trees included) of the Naram-Sîn's stele presents a keen methodological approach to the experience of the natural environment. Winter distinguishes between two main landscape types: the "in here" and the "out there". The first refers to the cultivated landscape within the state and includes: (1) "domesticated landscape" properly managed by the socio-political system (including fields and gardens); and (2) "symbolic landscapes" (for instance, the Assyrian "tree-of-life"). The "out there" landscape refers

The present study will investigate such phenomenon by focusing on a single example from the Zagros highlands: the rock-cut open-air sanctuary of Kūrangūn. This study is divided in two parts: the first includes empirical work describing the sanctuary and current main interpretations; the second examines those elements of the composition pointing to a phenomenon of interaction between religious, artistic, social attributes, and the natural environment. The article concludes with remarks on the significance of these relationships and by outlining points of intersection which may have been fundamental in determining the manufacture of the sanctuary.

2. Description of Kūrangūn

Kūrangūn is situated in the ancient highway linking the Elamite capitals of Susa and Anšan (Tal-e Malyan) [Pl. 1][9]. The sanctuary was carved on a rock-cliff ca. 80 m high atop an outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh which overlooks the Fahliyān River flowing through the panoramic Mamasani region, in the southwestern province of Fārs, Iran [Pl. 2]. The region preserves substantial evidence of archaeological remains some of which have engaged recent attention of a joint Iranian-Australian archaeological team (Potts 2008). The broader project includes excavation of the sites of Tulaspid (Tol-e Spid), Nurabad-e Mamasani (Tol-e Nurabad), and Jin-Jin (also Jinjunn, Qaleh Kali, Tepe Servan, or Suravan). The first two sites have provided evidence of Elamite remains and therefore ought to be considered of significance for establishing a regional pattern of Elamite settlements perhaps associated with the sanctuary of Kūrangūn. The documented presence at Tulaspid of a stamped brick mentioning a temple dedicated to Kilah-šupir by the 12th century BC king Šilhak-Inšušinak (to date elusive to the archaeologist's trowel) further points to the presence of religious Elamite architecture in the region (König 1965: 94, 41A; Vanden Berghe, 1966:56; Potts 2004; Potts et al. 2006; Potts and Roustaei 2006). Next to the village of Jinjun, located on the left bank of the river directly opposite Kūrangūn, excavations have uncovered monumental installations recalling Persian palatial architecture (Atarashi and Horiuchi 1963; Potts et al. 2007). The building has been associated with Achaemenid (royal) way-stations mentioned in the Persepolis tablets (Potts 2008). Lastly, the area surrounding the base of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh where the sanctuary is located includes remains of architectural installations and associated materials which despite preliminary suggestions made by Kleiss (1993) are yet to be thoroughly investigated[10].

The sanctuary exhibits an exclusive manifestation of Elamite art and religious ideology. Its manufacture required cutting deep into the vertical side of the rock-cliff in order to make a

to the zone outside the state's boundaries proper but "exploited by the state through hunting and gathering". For more on the representation of territorial landscapes within narratives along ideological experiential lines defining space as friendly, familiar, manageable and enclosed, or as hostile, alien, unmanageable and open see Wiggerman (1996), and Álvarez-Món (2004).

9 It is of interest to note that the origin of the name Kūrangūn remains uncertain. It is possible that it could derive from New Persian kurang(ah), 'a place for reviewing troops, a race ground', itself derived from Mongol *küren*, "camp, tent" (cf. Bakhtiari *k?rän*, "encampment"). The ending suffix of Kurang(ah) may have received the typical Persian geographic ending suffix –an which itself changes into –un in much spoken local Persian. But also, west of Isfahān in the Bakhtiary mountains, there is the Kūh-i-Rang (Kūh'rang), a derivative place of the source of the Karun river. For a possible Mongol association linked to placenames formed from *kūrān* see Eilers (1971: 453-4). I am grateful to my colleague Dan T. Potts for discussing these references with me.

10 This author visited the site in March 2003. The top of the mound directly above the relief had been recent exposed (it remains unclear by whom). It unveiled stone rectangular rooms with plastered surfaces terraced along the slope of the mound. W. Kleiss (1993) dated samples of pottery shards forum in this area of the mound to the second and first millennium BC D.T. Potts, however, disputes the accuracy of these statements (per. comm.).

three dimensional spatial unit oriented on a north-west/south-east direction[11]. Main compositional elements can be divided along two key manufacture configurations according to whether they were cut or sculpted in relief over the rock: (A) three flights of stairs link the summit of the hill with a rectangular platform measuring about 5 x 2 meters[12]. The perimeter of the platform is marked by three small receding depressions enclosing the carved remains of 26 fish swimming together in opposite directions. The fish are rather elongated and are characterized by a triangular head, two pairs of fins, and a tail [Pls. 5 a, b][13]. (B) Sculpted on the vertical surface of the rock about 60 cm over the platform are the remains of a rectangular panel measuring 1.6 x 3.64 m. Its surface was carved in low-relief with a pious religious scene representing an enthroned divine couple oriented in the direction of the staircase. The bearded male divinity sits on a throne made of a coiled serpent. His right hand is holding a ring and rod from which emerge two streams of flowing waters arching forwards and backwards to dispense their blessings to groups of worshipers framing the divine couple [Pl. 4b][14]. Carved in relief along the surface of the rock directly above the lower staircase are two rows of worshippers standing on flights of stairs. A third group is represented just below the actual staircase (Pl. 4a; Kūrangūn II). These three groups of about 40 male worshippers are represented in profile with long hair braided at the back ending on a looped knob; lower arms are extended and hands held together at waist level; they wear a short tunic held by a belt (Vanden Berghe 1986, fig. 2 nos. 9, 10, 11, 12).

The existence of Kūrangūn was revealed in 1924 by the German scholar E. Herzfeld (Pl. 3a; 1926: 259). Based on his description and line-drawings, N. Debevoise (1942: 79) proposed the carvings had been made at two different times. In Debevoise's view, the worshippers exhibited along the staircases predated the *Gutian* central panel because: *it is almost impossible to believe that anyone would have carved such a large group of people simply coming down to look at an earlier relief*. Herzfeld's work was superseded during fieldwork achieved in 1975 and 1979 by L. Vanden Berghe (1984 and 1986) [Pl. 3b] and, about the same time, by a study of the relief by Ursula Seidl (1986) [Pl. 3c]. As a result, it is presently believed that the flights of stairs leading to the horizontal platform and the central panel were made sometime between the 19th – 17th centuries BC (Kūrangūn I). This time-frame is based on the existence of close iconographic parallels between the imagery exhibited in the central panel and well dated cylinder seals [see Pls. 4b, 5c-e][15]. It is also believed the relief was afterward expanded by the addition of worshippers situated along the staircases and outside the

11 The orientation north-south indicated in the line-drawing presented by Herzfeld (1941, Abb. 304; see Pl. 5a) must be an error (Vanden Berghe 1986, Fig. 2; see Pl. 5b).

12 The actual manufacture of the reliefs remains to be thoroughly investigated. Based in the comments made by Vanden Bergue (1986: 161-2) and this authors' own study I will advance that five main distinct stages appear to have taken place in the manufacture and ornamentation of this and related Elamite reliefs from Izeh/Malamir: (1) A host rock area was selected and rectangular flat panels were cut; (2) imagery was carved over the rock in low-relief; (3) a stucco-like weather-resistant plaster was added to the surface and modelled; (4) detail was added by engraving; and (5) polychrome paint was added over the surface. The author is preparing an in-depth study of Kul-e Farah relief IV where these features will be discussed in detail.

13 It is of interest to compare the outline of these fish with similarly represented fish exhibited in a sealing from Anshan (Carter 1996, Fig. 34:8).

14 For a detailed description see Vanden Bergue (1986); U. Seidel (1986), and P. de Miroschedji (1981: 9, n. 27). Miroschedji suggests "the ring and rod seem to have been sketched and the ring was not emptied out", further adding: "that's why all the commentators of this monument saw a flowing vase". The main characteristics of the male god can be reduced to five elements: (1) He is sitting on throne made by one or more a lobed "serpents"; (2) The left hand holds one or two serpents; (3) The right hand holds the ring and rod from which originate (4) two streams of flowing waters and; (5) he wears a unique conical helmet capped by two horns and a pair of bovine ears; Behind (or next?) to him sits the female goddess.

15 More precisely, as suggested by U. Seidl, close analogies with imagery depicted in the sealings of kings Tan-Uli and Kuk-Našur II suggest a 17th century BC date.

central panel (Kūrangūn II). The date of these worshippers remains disputed as is the carving of the fish over the horizontal platform[16]. L. Vanden Berghe thought the worshippers were Neo-Elamite additions cut sometime during the 8th century BC (1963: 32; 1986, individuals numbers 13-49). This date came under scrutiny with U. Seidl, followed by additional commentators, proposing a late Middle-Elamite end of the second millennium BC date (Carter 1988: 146; Amiet 1992: 81)[17]. In addition, the four individuals carved on the south-eastern side (to the right of the central panel) are considered to have been added at the end of the Neo-Elamite period (Kūrangūn III; Vanden Berghe 1986, numbers 9-12; U. Seidl 1986: 12-13)[18].

In sum, all available evidence appears to indicate the life history of the sanctuary may have extended at least for a thousand years (c, 1650-650 BC). Of interest is to note that contrary to the closely related Elamite sanctuary of Naqsh-e Rustam which emerged as one of the most important funerary and cultic centers of Persian and Sassanian religious traditions, there is no evidence suggesting that a similar phenomenon took place at Kūrangūn. That is, unless, the Persian monumental architectural remains recently unearthed at Jin-Jin and located in direct view of the sanctuary prove to have religious significance; if that happened to be the case the religious value of Kūrangūn will be enormously enhanced.

3. Interpretations

The identification of the divine couple represented in the central panel has been the source of intense scholarly discussion[19]. An abridged version of this scene depicts an enthroned male divinity sitting on a coiled serpent throne presenting the ring and rod (and at least in one occasion streams of flowing waters) to an Elamite ruler or a high status individual [Pl. 5 c-e]. This imagery is an iconic visual formula shared by Elamite ruling elites during the second millennium. The iconography has been thoroughly discussed by P. de Miroschedji (1981), M. Trokay (1991), and Potts (1999: 182, with refs). To summarize, P. Amiet (1972: 294; 1973: 17), suggested the male divinity was to be identified with the Elamite Great God (dGAL) initially recognized as an epithet of Humban and (soon afterward) Napiriša (following W. Hinz 1971: 673; 1972: 52). An in-depth study of iconographic parallels by P. de Miroschedji (1981) proposed to identify the god with Inšušinak. This was rejected by F. Grillot and F. Vallat (1984; followed by L. Vanden Bergue 1986: 159 and U. Seidl 1986) who reasserted identification with the main representatives of the highland Elamite divine pantheon. E. Carter (1988: 148), based on F. Grillot (1986), has stressed the geographic location of the valley at the intersection of roads linking Anšan and the city-port of Liyan, both, respectively, under the divine aegis of Napiriša (the Great God) and Kiririša (the Great Goddess).

Most recently D.T. Potts (2004) has revisited this topic and suggested a more nuanced approach to the interpretation of the male divinity. Potts rejects the assumed highland/lowland

16 U. Seidl thinks they were carved with the rest of the platform during but E. Carter has pointed out parallels with fish depicted on a single sealing from Anshan (Tal-e Malyan) dated to the late second millennium BC (Carter 1988: 146, nt. 1; Carter 1996, fig. 34:8). It could be possible, she indicates, the fish were added when the complex was enlarged late in the second millennium BC.

17 This late second millennium BC date is based on parallels with similarly depicted worshippers from Kul-e Farah (Izeh/Mālamīr). It should be stressed, however, that neither the date nor the specific characteristics of the braided worshippers depicted in the reliefs of Kul-e Farah III and IV are without controversy.

18 U. Seidl (1986: 12, nt. 43) noted parallels between these four figures and those depicted at KF II; a relief she dates to the late Neo-Elamite period following Vanden Berghe (1963), Waele (1973), and Calmeyer (1973).

19 See: le panneau central in L. Vanden Bergue 1986: 159, nt. 6; Trokay (1991), Potts (2004).

dichotomy between Napiriša and Inšušinak and instead stresses their documented association with water imagery and with their Mesopotamian counterpart Enki/Ea[20]. It appears that P. de Miroschedji (1981: 25) reached a similar conclusion when at the end of an exhaustive article suggested: "certainly, we can turn around the difficulty and assume that the relief (referring, in this case, to the upper register of the stele of Untaš-Napiriša) represents Inšušinak under the traits of Napiriša, which implies that the iconography of the two divinities was interchangeable". In this regard both P. de Miroschedji and D.T. Potts introduce a relative comparative element into the interpretation of the male divinity from Kūrangūn. It is tempting to see some sort of syncretism where the two representatives of lowland and highland Elamite pantheons merged key attributes into a single encompassing reality; as it were: a Great God (dGAL) compellingly manifested through equivalence with the primeval life-giving aspects of flowing water.

To date, written sources are silent regarding the existence of Kūrangūn. Hence, not only its native Elamite name remains unidentified but discussions of religious beliefs, liturgical and ritual activities, or intended audiences remain highly dependent on interpretation of its main architectural and sculptural features. The notion that Kūrangūn provided a cultic setting for periodic worship and pilgrimage is primarily supported by the presence of actual staircases leading to the bottom of the platform and by rows of devotees carved along virtual staircases (Carter 1988: 146). It also should be noted that the reliefs are not visible from the bottom of the valley[21]. Hence, interaction with the sanctuary (and its manifested deities) was made through the pathway provided by the staircase and took place within the "intimate" narrow contextual setting provided by the platform. Yet, the character of this interaction and rituals involved remain matters open to speculation. In this regard, a study by G. Gropp (1992: 113) proposes to conceptualize the sanctuary as a three-dimensional unity defined by the presence of an actual enclosed rectangular ritual basin. This is an attractive possibility which cannot be strictly rejected but neither confidently asserted given the lack of supporting evidence. As mentioned, the recesses and fish carved over the surface of the horizontal platform imply the presence of a *symbolic* basin but there is no indication of a free standing low-wall bordering the open outer-edge and thus effectively creating an enclosed basin[22]. Neither, as E. Carter suggests (1988: 147, nt. 6), is there evidence that "water probably flowed out of the rocks at Kūrangūn in antiquity." These hypotheses, however, reaffirms in a practical way what is already advertised by the embedded emblematic interplay of visual features: the holy waters emerging from the hands of Napiriša/Inšušinak being received by the worshippers and perhaps implicitly "streaming

20 The counterpart of Napiriša in Mesopotamia was Enki/Ea, the god of the underground sweet, flowing, water (Abzû) representing fertility and abundance but there is also evidence suggesting that Inšušinak had Enki/Ea and Enzag as epithets (Vallat 1997; MDP 28, n.7). This insight maybe further supported by a difference on the two versions of coiled serpent throne used by the divinity (one is androcephalic, the other has a dragon head; Seidl 1986: 20-1; Miroschedji 1981: 47). For the fish of Enki see note 26.

21 The only means to have an overall complete view of the relief (with the obvious exception of the horizontal basin-platform depicting the fish) is by standing directly on the opposite side of the cliff. This is not a location particularly suitable to those suffering from vertigo.

22 To be fair-minded, it is true that the open side of the platform is missing. Hence, one can argue, it is not entirely impossible that a free standing wall was situated alongside the edge of the platform. If such was the case, I will suggest, its height probably matched that of the baseline marking the central relief and the height of the last step of the staircase (that is, about 60 cm high). Incidentally, and in answer to further comments made by G. Gropp (1992), there is no indication of motion where the worshippers are "descending the staircase", they are represented standing on each step; Further, the notion that "on the right side of the chamber, we see some worshippers climbing out of the water again and joining the group of deities" is also problematic; The presence of a temple on top of the mound is unattested (the architectural remains atop the mound mentioned above do not bring light into the subject); As for the notion that the urban planning of 4th millennium Susa presents a prototype for Indus cities, there is simply no evidence to support this claim.

down" into a rectangular basin occupied by swimming fish (Miroschedji 1981: 9).

Along these interpretative lines, a recent study by D.T. Potts (2004) has emphasized the *immanent* and *numinous* properties of the sanctuary linking its significance to an overall harmonization of meaning at play between the vertical and horizontal relief panels. In addition, Potts has suggested this interplay extends beyond the sanctuary and ought to embrace the surrounding natural landscape dominated by the Rudkhaneh-e Fahliyān River which, "when viewed from the relief itself, forms such a dramatic part of the landscape" (Potts 2004: 143). From the vantage view point of a person standing atop the sanctuary the river flows majestically throughout the open valley in a wide bend and turns sharply southwest at the exact point where it strikes the outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh, directly below Kūrangūn[23]. Indeed, the breathtaking natural setting surrounding this particular location—obvious enough, I believe, to those privileged to have visited the site— supports close association between the manufacture of the shrine and its natural contextual landscape.

4. Kūrangūn and the Aesthetics of the Natural Environment

By incorporating into the overall *mise en scène* of the shrine the waters of the Fahliyān River the sanctuary emerges as a coherent three-dimensional ideological unity embracing an exclusive interaction of religious, socio-cultural, and natural realities. The staged coherence of this unity, I believe, relies on a sophisticated manufacture and treatment of the following artistic and ideological components:

(1) The worshipers are placed along staircases mirroring *real* staircases, most likely representing the final act of a sequence of pilgrimage and communal rituals whose particular socio-cultural characteristics remain unknown[24]. (2) A second interplay can be deduced from the representation of streams of sanctified water emerging from the hand of the divinity and a basin with fish with implied reference to the *actual* waters of the Fahliyān River[25]. (3) A third but uncertain overlap can also be assumed to have existed within the symbolic representation of an "Abzû" basin with fish (perhaps —but not surely— replicating the presence of a *real* Abzû basin)[26]. (4) A fourth,

23 D.T. Potts has reviewed the importance of water resources in the Nurabad-Fahliyan region stressing the unique agricultural properties of an area which enjoys the highest rainfall in Fārs allowing for the production of double cropping (Potts 2004: 149).

24 Indeed, it is difficult to avoid thinking parallels between the Kūrangūn worshipers and the tribute bearers from the Apadana at Persepolis (which are positioned climbing a staircase). To be rhetorical, are we to believe that the Achaemenid master planners of Persepolis knew nothing of the highland Elamite religious ritual and its visual counterpart at Kūrangūn?

25 Incidentally, the *purādu*-fish are described in the Epic of Erra and Išum as the Seven Sages of the Abzû, perfect in lofty wisdom like Ea, their lord. Dalley (1989: 292) translates the term as carp but the fish represented at Kūrangūn lack the long dorsal fin characterizing carps.

26 In order to add further ammunition to this theory it should be recalled that, although few in number, stone basins symbolizing the Abzû are a key feature of Mesopotamian, Assyrian, and Elamite temple ritual (see Plate 6). The Abzû-House was the temple of Enki/Ea in Eridu. To provide some examples: (1) An Early Dynastic period Abzû stone made basin shaped like a bathtub was found in the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu (Tello). It is housed at the Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul. The surface of the basin is covered with rows of female goddesses holding vases with streams of water (Black and Green 1992: 139, Fig. 114); (2) An Assyrian Abzû basin, from the temple of Ashur at Aššur; Sennacherib (704-681 BC), H. 1.18 x 3.12 m^2. It is housed at the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Black and Green 1992: 27, Fig. 18). The outer surface includes representation of fish-cloaked figures representing the sages Apkallu. These beings are closely associated with water, the god Enki/Ea, and the symbol of Ea: the goat-fish. The Apkallu appear next to a figure holding an overflowing vase (see Dalley 2008: 1-3); Evidence of Elamite 'Abzu' basins is of two kinds: both dated to the 13th - 12th century BC; (3) A calcite stone basin (0.92 m x 0.628 m, by 0.17 m high; Louvre Museum Sb 19) whose edge is covered with a guilloche, the outer surface with pairs of fish-goats framing a 'tree of life'. The inner surface is covered with series of recesses lading to an in-depth rectangular surface of unknown significance (Amiet 1966: 394, Fig. 298 A); (4) A similar basin may be represented in the Sit-

and more broad, level of ideological analogy can be conceived to have existed between the chief religious shrine/s topping the Elamite (and Mesopotamian) ziggurats and the placement of the sanctuary atop an outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh[27].

The alleged interaction of these four components conveys multiple insights into areas of correspondence linking cultic performances, high shrines, and the natural environment. They also support an emerging picture of artistic enterprise whose notions of representation were conceived in reference to components of a whole encompassing metaphysical ideological (religious) aspects as well as tangential physical (natural) aspects.

In more concrete terms, this artistic enterprise provides a frame of reference for a religious metaphor. The combined patronage of the Elamite rulers and those in charge of conceptualizing Kūrangūn devised a revelatory "place of encounter" providing a setting for a momentous climax: the bestowing of symbols of power (ring and rod) and blessings (holy water) by the divine couple to the Elamite royal elites. This revelation is rooted in the notion that water imagery and its direct corresponding natural expression (in this case, the waters of the Fahliyān river) represent a life force (*numen*) emanating from the divine and, as it where, vertically intersecting three dimensions of the human experiential realm: the religious/supernatural, the socio-cultural, and the natural environment/physical[28].

It is reasonable to ask how the previous analysis and interpretation of Kūrangūn furthers our understanding of its creative process. I would like to suggest that the sanctuary present the intertwining of *pathways* that when considered as a unit articulate key aspects of the creative and ideological originality of the Elamite highlands: (1) We are looking at the mechanics of art making as a strategy whose main function is to provide *mediation* for cultural aspects; in this case linking religious ideology, society, and the natural environment. The notion that art's main function is to mediate culture underscores the dynamism imbedded in the artistic traditions of the ancient Near East; (2) There is a unified "world-view" or rationale at play underlying the overall composition of the sanctuary that can be best identified as the integration of the human subject *within* the natural environment. This unified paradigm is supported by the absence of concrete ideological or physical boundaries separating the religious, from the social and the natural world. Moreover,

Šamsi ceremony bronze behind the grove of trees; (5) There is also the 13th-12th centuries BC bronze made "altar" limited by the presence of a large serpent's body. Five individual, figures stand holding vessels with both hands. It was found at the Susa Acropolis (Louvre Museum Sb 185; Amiet 1966: 383).

27 I can think of two reasons why this analogy is not as farfetched as it may first appear. (1) There is textual evidence indicating the ziggurat was perceived to symbolize a mountain raising the high-shrine to heaven amongst the stars. Some ceremonial names of Mesopotamian temples indicate a cosmological understanding positioning the ziggurat between heaven and earth (see George 1993; in particular Part Two: Gazetteer 63-161). For instance, a concrete example from the time of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1078 BC) reads: "*... I planned and laboriously rebuilt and completed the pure temple, the holy shrine, their (shrine houses of Anu and Adad) joyful abode, their happy dwelling which stand out like the stars of heaven and which represents the choicest skills of the building trade. Its interior I decorated like the interior of heaven. I decorated its walls as splendidly as the brilliance of rising stars. I raised its tower-gates and its ziggurats to the sky and made fast its parapets with baked bricks. I brought the gods Anu and Adad, the great god inside and set them on their exalted thrones*" (Grayson 1976: 18). (2) Secondly, there is archaeological and textual evidence indicating the presence of of Elamite ziggurats (zagratume, zikkurtium) and high shrines *kukunnum* (from Sum. gi-gú-na/gi-gun$_4$-na > Akk. *gigunû*; a term possibly but not necessarily synonymous with ziggurat; Potts forthcoming) at main urban centers linking the Susiana plain and the Persian Gulf port of Liyan (Bushire). These are: Choga Pahn East (KS 102) Susa, Deh-e Now (KS 120), Choga-Zanbil, and Liyan (Tol-e Peytul). Hence, I will suggest that the location, symbolic and religious significance of these shrines could not have been disregarded by those responsible for the conceptualization and manufacture of Kurangun (on the Elamite ziggurats see Dan T. Potts forthcoming).

28 This understanding makes no distinction between the assumed noted chronological differences extant within the sanctuary.

the integration of the natural landscape into the broader conception of the sanctuary suggests an attempt at capturing the dramatic and sublime feeling engendered by nature. At this regard, it may be unattainable to attempt determine what was the original impetus behind the creation of the sanctuary. Was it the experience of nature that determined the creation of the sanctuary (the place preceded its construction) or the sanctuary that consecrated the space?

To bring this analysis to a close, in this paper I have laboured to refine notions of art and religion by stressing pathways of interaction. By such doing, I have purposely relocated the emphasis of analytical interest from isolated schemes into an organic holistic model. It is blatantly obvious that the reflections and possible ramifications provoked by this analysis take our subject of enquiry well into far reaching speculative arenas addressing longstanding questions regarding the nature and function of ancient art. They also illustrate the scope of complexity in attempting imposing boundaries into a creative effort seemingly addressing a whole organic entity combining various fields of academic research. To leave the question open: should the very terms "art' and "religion" be conceived as separate dimensions of ancient Near Eastern society?

At the end, however, more evidence regarding Elamite religious and aesthetic "viewpoints" is required in order to confidently pursue these and related avenues of enquiry and bring to bearing the exceptional features exhibited in the highland rock-cut sanctuary of Kūrangūn.

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Pl. 7. View of Kūrangūn (black & white photograph after U. Seidl 1986, Tafel 3a).

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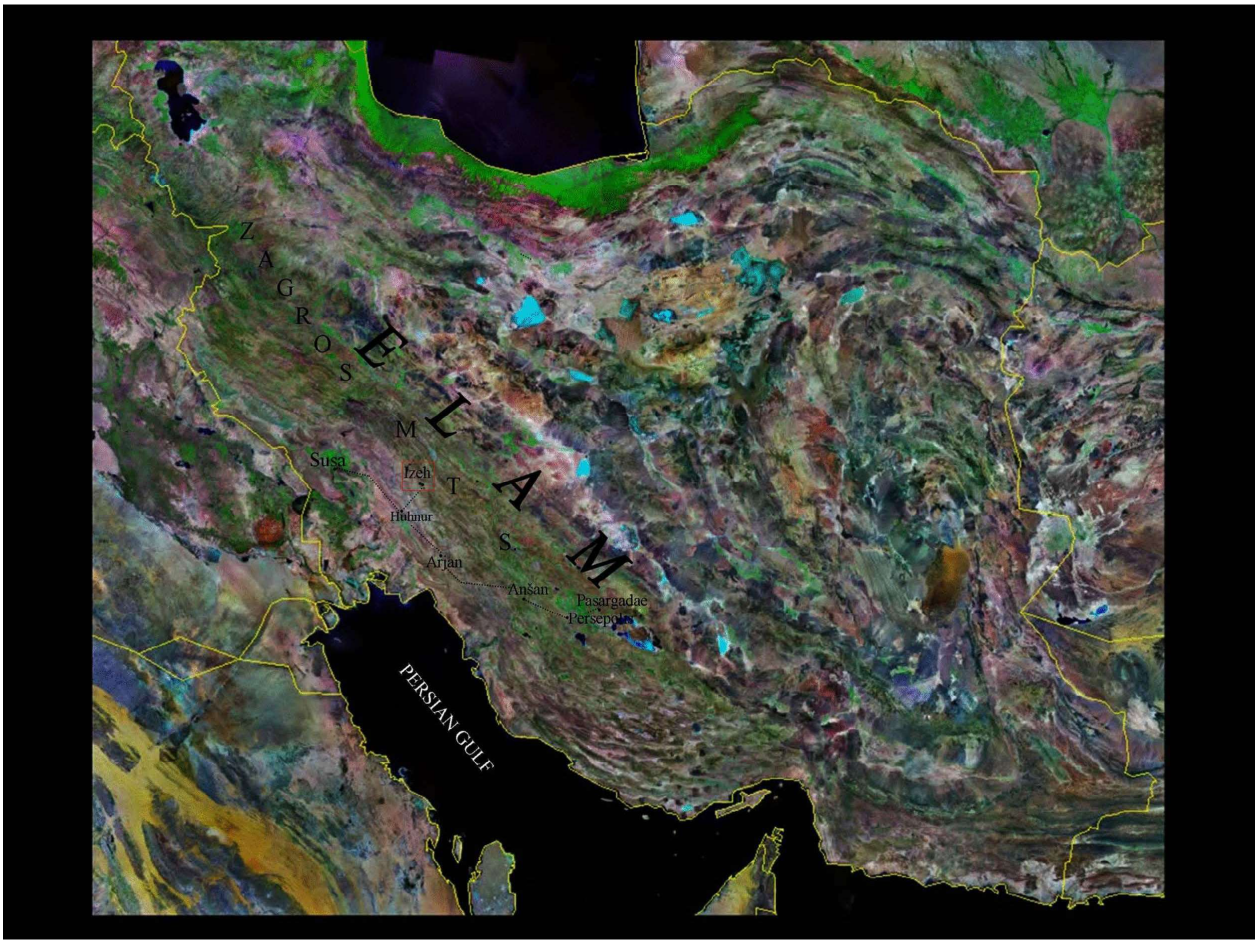
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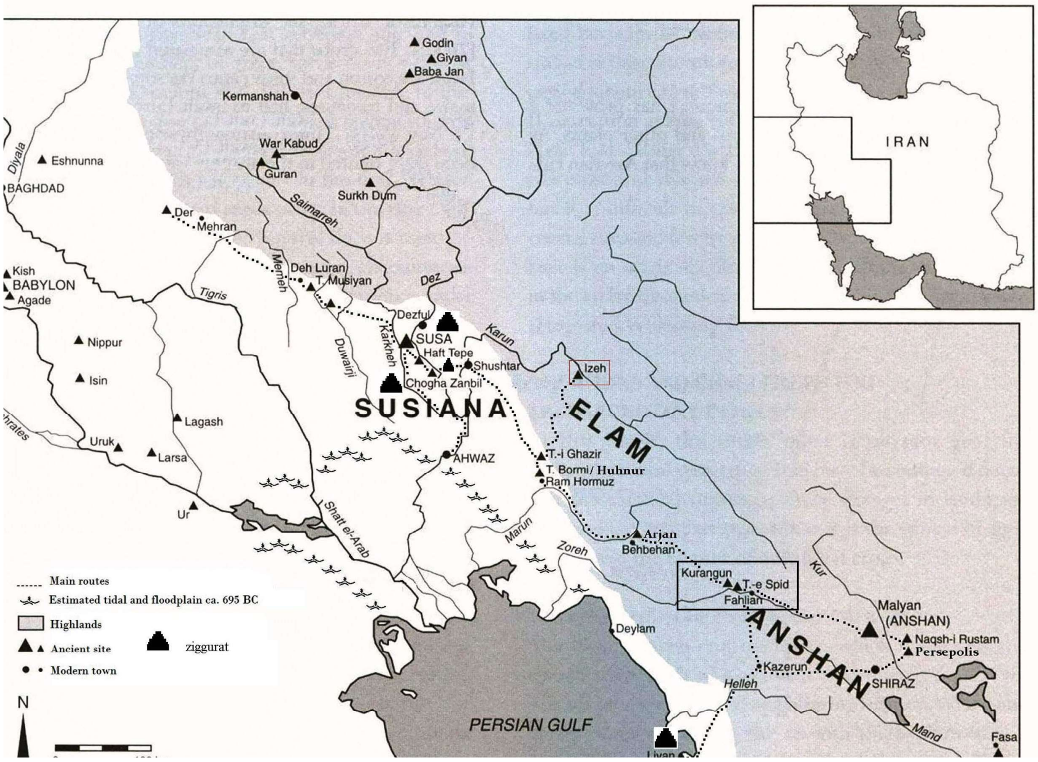
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Mehmeh
Deh Luran
T. Musiyan
Kish
BABYLON
Agade
Tigris
Dez
Dezful
SUSA
Karun
Karkheh
Haft Tepe
Shushtar
Duwairij
Nippur
Isin
Chogha Zanbil
Izeh
SUSIANA
ELAM
Lagash
Uruk
Larsa
AHWAZ
T.-i Ghazir
T. Bormi/ Huhnur
Ram Hormuz
Ur
Shatt el-Arab
Marun
Arjan
Behbehan
Zoreh
Kurangun
T.-e Spid
Fahlian
Kur
Malyan
(ANSHAN)
ANSHAN
Naqsh-i Rustam
Persepolis
Kazerun
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Helleh
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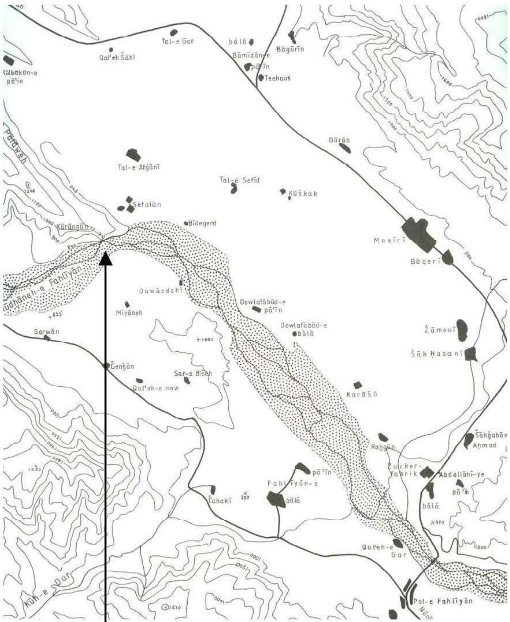
Highlands
Ancient site
ziggurat
Modern town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Rahgūn
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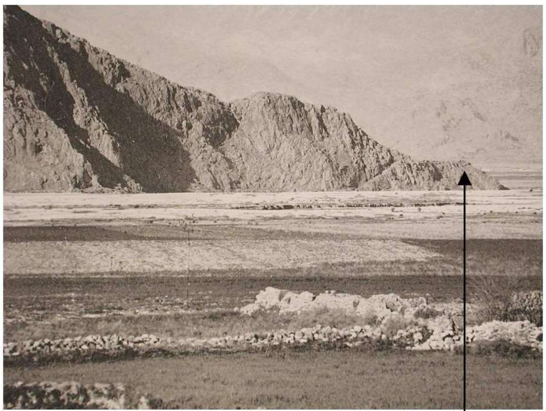

PLATE 3

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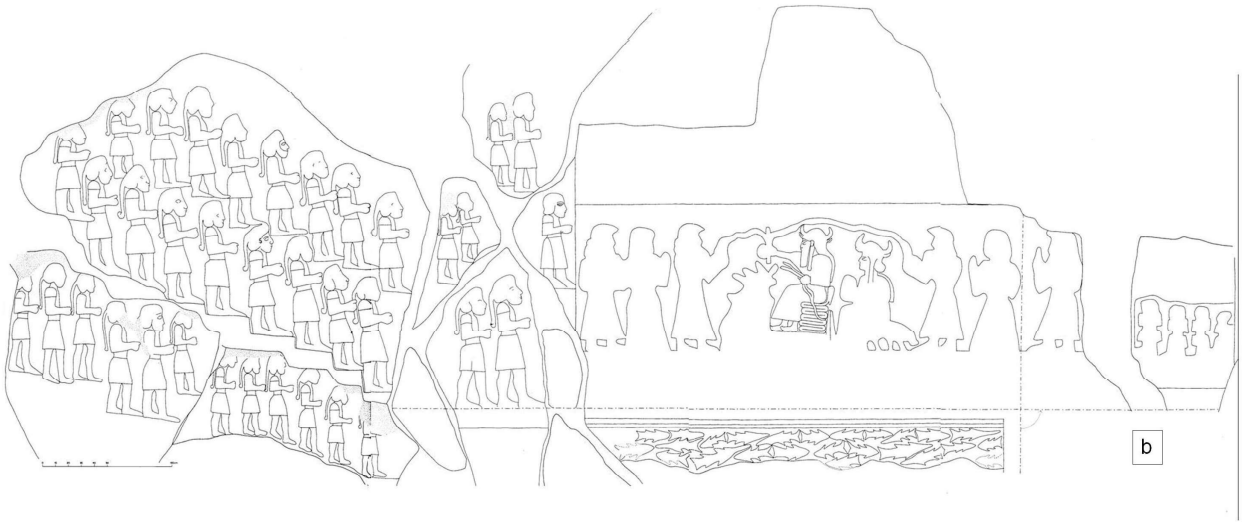

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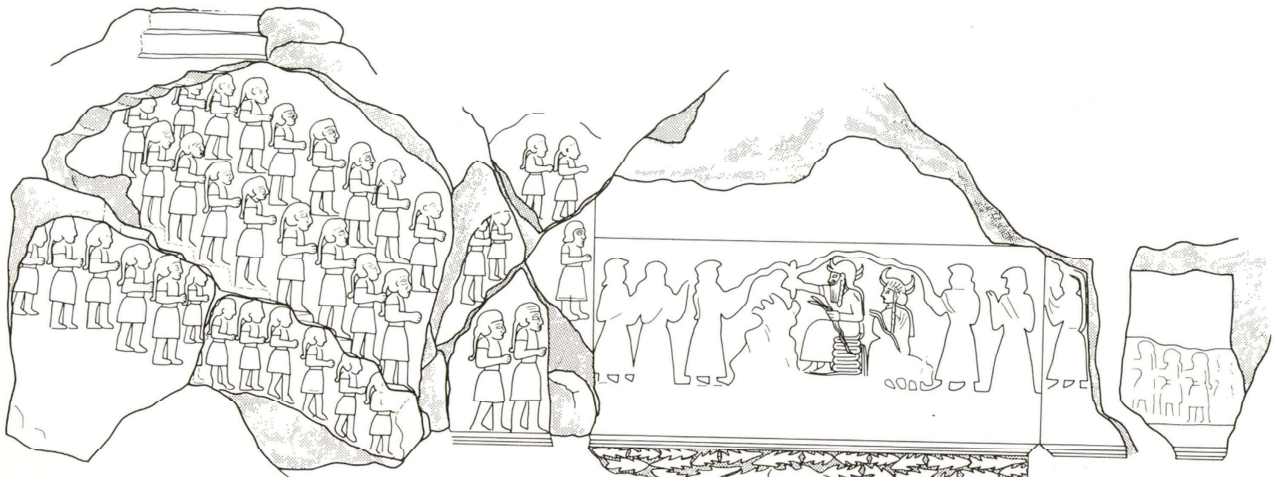

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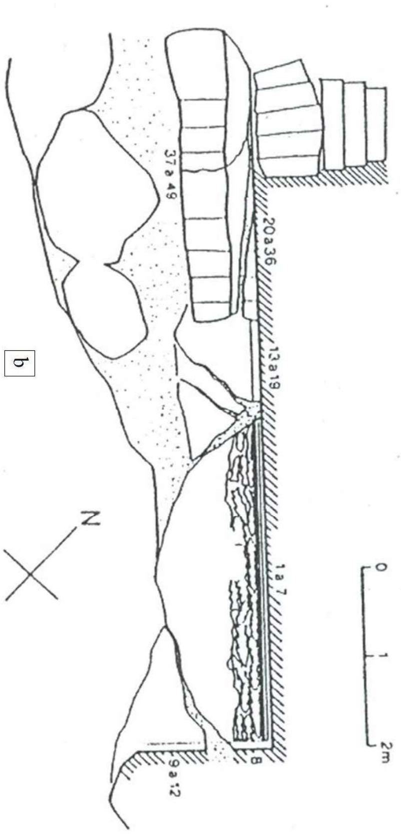
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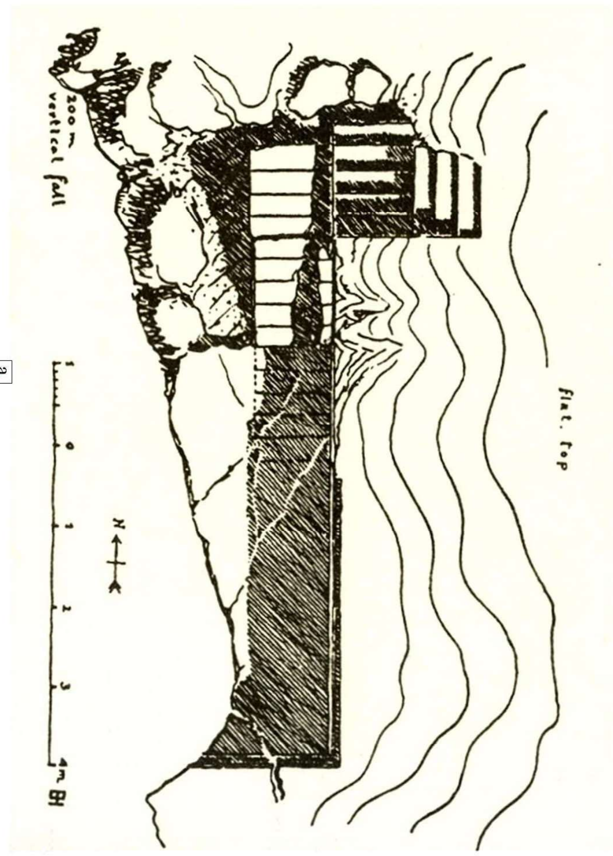
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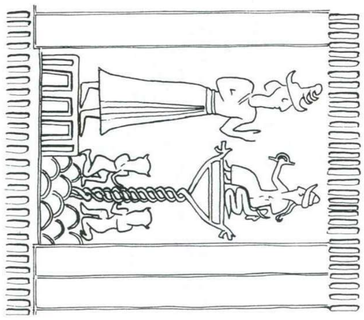

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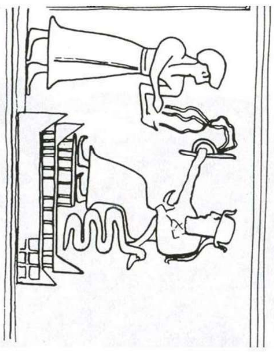

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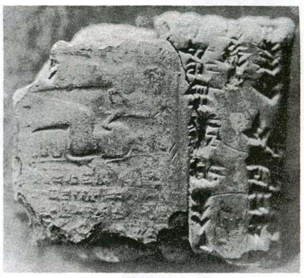

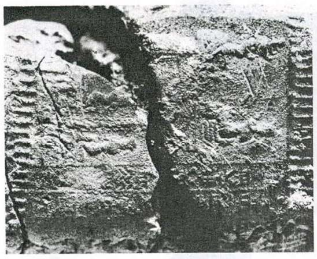

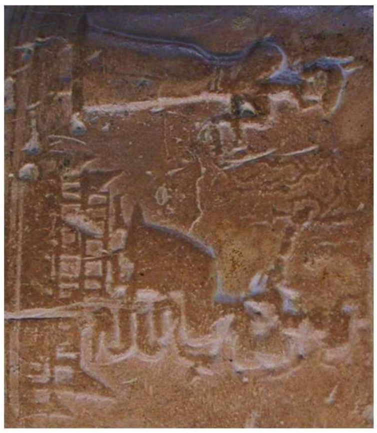

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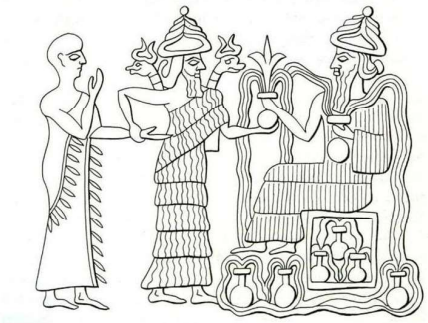

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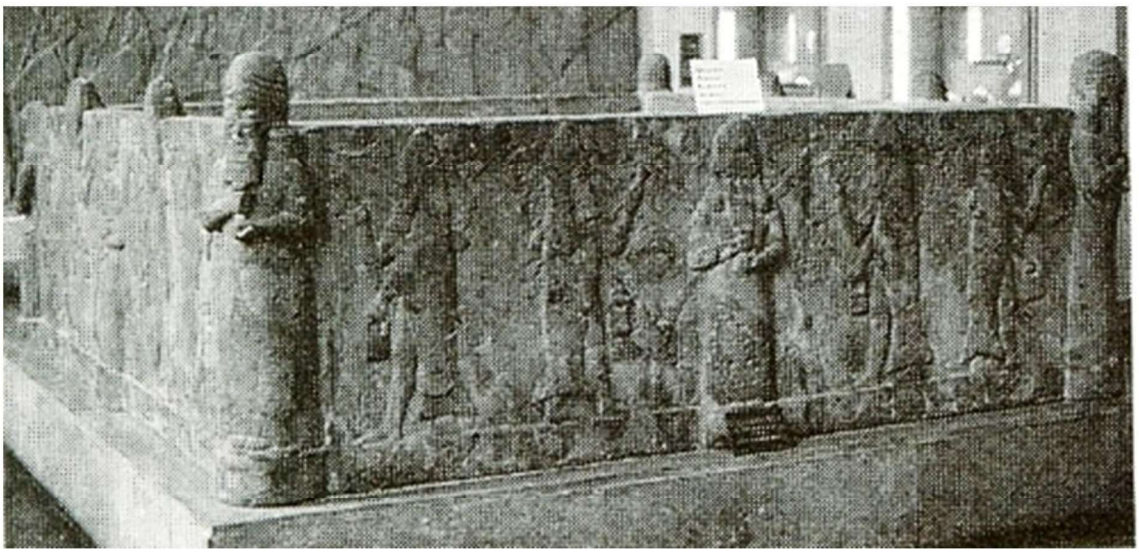

PLATE 7