



پیکرک‌های گلی مفصل‌بندی‌شده عیلامی از شوش:
مطالعه موردی کار با بایگانی‌های بجای مانده رولان دومکنم
یاسمینا ویکس

چکیده

در اوایل سال ۱۳۱۲ خورشیدی، هیئت باستان‌شناسی فرانسوی در شوش، به سرپرستی رولان دومکنم، دو پیکره انسانی کوچک سفالی مفصل‌بندی‌شده (پیکرک‌های ساخته شده از قطعات مختلف که قطعات با مفتول به بدنه پیکرک اضافه شده است) را در بافت تدفینی بخش جنوبی تپه شهرشاهی (دانژن) در منتهی‌الیه جنوب محوطه کشف کردند. این پیکرها که هم اکنون در موزه ملی ایران نگهداری می‌شود، تنها یافته منفرد کاوش نبودند و در همان فضا یک پیکره نسبتاً کامل مفصل‌بندی‌شده و چهار سر دیگر به دست آمد که به احتمال زیاد متعلق به اشیاء مشابه است. این مقاله به بررسی این یافته‌ها می‌پردازد و تلاش می‌کند تا سرنخ‌هایی درباره محل کشف و گاهنگاری آن‌ها ارائه دهد و در فرآیند انجام کار، نمونه‌ای از امکانات و محدودیت‌های کار با بایگانی‌های بسیار مشکل‌ساز کاوش‌های دومکنم در شوش ارائه شده است.

واژگان کلیدی: پیکرک‌ها، سرهای سفالی مدل‌سازی‌شده، آیین‌های تدفین عیلامی، شوش، بخش جنوبی تپه شهرشاهی، موزه ملی ایران.

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**Elamite Articulated Clay Figurines from Susa:
A Case Study in Engaging with the Legacy Records of Roland de Mecquenem**
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Abstract

In early 1933, working under the direction of Roland de Mecquenem, the French archaeological delegation at Susa excavated two small articulated human terracotta figurines in a burial context in the Donjon mound at the far south of the site. This delightful pair, now housed in the National Museum of Iran, was not an isolated find this year, the same area having yielded one near-complete articulated figurine and four other heads that must have belonged to similar objects. This article examines these finds and attempts to ascertain clues as to their find spots and chronology, and, in doing so, provides an example of both the possibilities and limits of engaging with the notoriously problematic records of Mecquenem's excavations at Susa.

Keywords: Figurines; modelled clay heads; Elamite funerary practices; Susa; Donjon mound; Iran National Museum.

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Introduction

Between 2 January and 10 April, 1933, the French archaeological delegation working at Susa under the direction of Roland de Mecquenem dedicated much of its effort to the Donjon mound at the southern tip of the site [figs. 1-2]. Excavations progressed below the pavement of what was recognised (incorrectly) as a Sassanian palace¹, and continued several meters down to a level of around -7.50 m (Mecquenem 1933: 7, Pl. XVIII). One of the most interesting discoveries during these works was a

1. The palatial constructions on the mound have since been reassigned to an earlier period; probably the Parthian or Seleucid period (Boucharlat and Shahidi 1987: 324, n. 13), or possibly even the Achaemenid period (e.g. Potts 2016: 331).

pair of small articulated terracotta figurines, a male and a female, which had been deposited together in a burial. This delightful couple, whose heads are now housed in the National Museum of Iran, was not an isolated find this year. Five more articulated terracotta figurines were encountered in the same general area of the site, one preserved with its body and one arm basically intact and the other four surviving only as heads².

Agnes Spycket (1992) has catalogued and carefully described all seven of these objects and a few other small heads of articulated figurines from un-

2. Amiet (1966: 440-43) uses the term “articulated” to describe the figurines (i.e. having sections connected by a joint allowing movement).



Fig. 1. Topographic map of Susa with mounds labelled (after Ghirshman 1954, plan 1).



Fig. 2. Photograph of Donjon excavations in 1933 (from Mecquenem 1933, Pl. XXXIV, 52).

known contexts at Susa in her magnum opus, *Les figurines de Suse*. Building on Spycket's treatment, the present article delves further into records of Mecquenem's work carried out at Susa in 1933 to ascertain whether any more information can be established regarding the find contexts, dating, and possible social significance of the Elamite couple and their counterparts. In doing so, it also offers a case study of both the possibilities and the limits of engaging with the notoriously problematic records of Mecquenem's excavations at Susa, and demonstrates their potential relevance to analyses of Elamite artefacts stored in the National Museum of Iran.

The Figurines, Their Find Contexts and Dating

The heads are arranged below into three groups to facilitate discussion of their characteristics, find spots and dating, with catalogue numbers assigned by Spycket preserved for the sake of convenience and ease of cross-referencing. The first group is composed of the Elamite couple found in the Donjon burial in 1933 (Spycket 1992, nos. 1207-

8)³, the second is composed of the near-complete figurine and four heads found the same year in the same mound (Spycket 1992, nos. 1210, M 32, 1211, 1212 and 1216), and the third is a motley crew of small heads from unknown locations at Susa (Spycket 1992, nos. 1209, 1213, 1214, 1215).

Group 1, nos. 1207 and 1208

This well-preserved pair of terracotta heads catalogued as 499 a-b in the National Museum of Iran [fig. 3] were published the year after their excavation in volume 25 of the *Mémoires de la délégation en Perse* (MDP) as a pair of "Ur III" figurines from a "tombeau" (Mecquenem 1934b: 234, Pl. XIV.1)⁴. Representing a man (no. 1207) and a woman (no. 1208), the two diminutive heads measure about 4 cm

3. Spycket (1992: 193-94) does not question the burial context for the two figurines.

4. They are absent, however, from Mecquenem's (1943) more substantial publication of the Donjon finds in MDP 29, which presents around 500 burials from the third and early second millennium BCE. The heads later made an appearance in *Archéologie Vivante* 1968-69 vol. 1/1, no. 164, p. 134.

high and are both modelled in the same style, with a wide forehead, large eyes delineated by deep grooved outlines, a triangular chin, and a V-shaped mouth⁵. Both still carry traces of black paint on their surfaces. The man has a goatee beard, large crescent ears, and flat beret-like cap, whereas the woman has a hair-free face, lacks the large ears and has a thick, plaited crown-like hairstyle with a slight central protuberance (a diadem?). An attempt to render old age on both the man and the woman is suggested by the addition of lines representing crow's feet wrinkles at the outer corners of the eyes. The lines preserve paint indicating that they were original features and not later scratches in the surface. The heads exhibit other features commonly associated with old age including small receding chins hinting at tooth loss, overly large ears on the man, and a forward slanting head on the woman implying the hunched posture linked to osteoporosis.

According to the limited documentation on their discovery, each head had been fixed, using the extension of the neck as a tenon, onto the shoulders of a separately made body (Mecquenem 1934b: 234). The bodies were both quite damaged and they do not appear to have been retained after excavation. Evidently, the heads were not shipped to the museum until Mecquenem's last year of excavations in 1939, when they were registered in the inventory of objects as lot no. 166, "2 Têtes de poupées, Terre crue, XXIIIème s. avt. J.C. Suse".

It is not possible to determine the type of burial in which the heads were supposed to have been deposited, as the term "tombeau" was applied by Mecquenem quite indiscriminately to different types of burials. However, it is unlikely to have been a tomb chamber, since he did not generally ascribe this type of construction to the reign of the Ur III dynasts at Susa. His attribution of the couple to the Ur III period, which he situated in the 23rd century BCE according to the proposed chronology of the time (for which see Jacobsen 1939), implies that they occurred at a much lower level than the group 2 heads, which he dated to the 15th century BCE. Alternatively, since he did not explicitly state any stratigraphic rationale, his Ur III date may have rested on stylistic variation. Indeed, he used the highly individualised, modelled heads of the couple with "amusing expressions", to illustrate his

point that the "23rd century" figurines in the Donjon showed far greater variation than those of "the 20th century" (or "reign of Hammurabi", see again chronology in Jacobsen 1939) (Mecquenem 1934b: 234); an observation that reflects the increasing reliance on single-face moulds, which enabled repeated casting of identical images, after their introduction in the Ur III period⁶. Mecquenem's 1933 annual report for the French government, the sponsor of the archaeological mission at Susa, brings no clarity to these matters. It displays the two heads together in a photograph sometime after their removal from the ground (Mecquenem 1933, fig. 56bis) but neglects to mention them in the text.

Being such unique productions, this pair of heads is very difficult to date on stylistic grounds. The man's cap, beret-like in shape with a vertical, slightly raised front, flat top and projecting back does not find any good comparisons in the artistic record. Spycket (1992: 193) regards the heads as Middle Elamite productions based on her perception that the woman's elaborate crown-like hair or headdress carries a diadem incorporating a central protuberance recalling those on Middle Elamite naked female figurine-plaques. However, since the central protuberance is not pronounced, the hairstyle is difficult to separate from the crown-like updo seen on female figurine-plaques of the preceding centuries⁷. A pre-Middle Elamite manufacture date should not, therefore, be excluded.

Group 2, nos. 1210 (with body), M 32, 1211, 1212 and 1216

These five images, all depicting males, are documented in the 1933 annual report with photographs taken after their excavation (Mecquenem 1933: 7, Pls. 31, no. 43 and 32, no. 44). They seem to have been inventoried together this year in the same lot, P 395, as "5 heads and a body, terracotta, 15th century BC". Presently, nos. 1211 [fig. 5] (Spycket 1992: 194-95, Pls. 138-39)⁸, 1212 [fig. 4] (Spy-

6. For the introduction of single-face moulds and the birth of the figurine-plaque, see Sakal (2018: 222) and Álvarez-Mon (2020: 174).

7. Furthermore, it can be noted that Spycket's catalogue does actually show a handful of Sukkalmah period examples with the distinct diadem protuberance (e.g. Spycket 1992, nos. 463, 466, 472, 473 and 484), though none have a secure stratigraphic context.

8. Also published in Rutten 1936: 281, C-D; Amiet 1966: 440-41, no. 336 A-B; Spycket 1981: 316, n. 108.

5. Dimensions stated for the terracotta figurines throughout follow Spycket 1992.



Fig. 3 . Modelled heads of an elderly couple excavated in 1933 in the Donjon mound: no. 1207 - National Museum of Iran, no. 499 b, field inv. X 166(?), terracotta male head, traces of paint, h. 4 cm; no. 1208 - National Museum of Iran, no. 499 a, field inv. X 166(?), pink terracotta female head, traces of paint, h. 3.8 cm (images courtesy J. Álvarez-Mon).

cket 1992: 195, Pl. 139)⁹, 1216 [fig. 5] (Spycket 1992: 195, Pl. 139) are catalogued at the Louvre Museum, whereas nos. 1210 [fig. 4] (Spycket 1992: 194, Pl. 138) and M 32 [fig. 4] (Spycket 1992: 195, Pl. 139) [figs. 4-5] remain unaccounted for. Mecquenem did not discuss them at all in connection with nos. 1207-1208, despite their discovery the same year,

9. Also published in Rutten 1936: 281, A-B; Amiet 1966: 442, no. 337; Spycket 1981: 316, n. 109.

perhaps because he regarded them as later productions. In MDP 25 he briefly mentioned the discovery of these “dolls’ heads in raw and baked clay”, dedicating particular attention to describing no. 1210, which he erroneously believed had been sent to Tehran (Mecquenem 1934b: 226-227; followed by Spycket 1992: 194)¹⁰.

10. My sincerest thanks to Yousef Hassanzadeh for his significant efforts to find this figurine in the National Museum of Iran.



Fig. 4. Modelled heads (and body) excavated in 1933 in the Donjon mound: no. 1210 - museum unknown, field inv. P 395?; clay head, hollow neck, flat body, articulated arm(s), body h. 12.9 cm (head height not recorded) (after Spycket 1992, Pl. 138); no. 1212 - Louvre Museum, no. Sb 8491, field inv. P 395?; grey terracotta head, hollow neck pierced by two side holes, beret hairstyle pierced by six holes; traces of paint; h. 6.8 cm (images modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127591>); no. M 32 - museum unknown, grey (?) terracotta head, hole at front of neck, traces of paint; excavated in 1933, Donjon (after Spycket 1992, Pl. 139).



Fig. 5. Modelled heads excavated in 1933 in the Donjon mound: no. 1211 - Louvre Museum, no. Sb 3078, field inv. P 395², cream terracotta head, hollow neck pierced by four holes, traces of paint, h. 5.7 cm (images modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127590>); no. 1216 - Louvre Museum, no. Sb 2816, field inv. 395, beige-pink terracotta head with conical hairstyle or hat, hollow neck pierced by three holes (back and sides), traces of paint, h. 10.7 cm (images modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127593>).

Known only from a photograph taken after excavation (here fig. 4; Mecquenem 1933, Pl. 32, no. 44, also published in Mecquenem 1934b: 226-27, with an incorrect reference in text to plate XIII.2 rather than the correct plate XIV.2), it was found with a well-preserved body formed from a rectangular clay plate (marked with incisions or fingernails?) doubled over on itself. Separately made arms were inserted in the space between the two sides of the doubled-over plate and presumably secured via a pin through holes in the slightly protruding shoulders. Part of one arm “too thin for the body”, is shown attached to the shoulder in the photograph. The arm appears to have a slightly different surface texture to the body, suggesting it might have been made from a different material, but this is difficult to properly assess from the photograph. A central hole at the top of the body enabled fixture of the head by passing a rod through the hollow neck. Lateral holes in the hollow necks of M 32, 1211, 1212 and 1216 suggest the same meth-

od of joining¹¹. The head carries a beret-like cap or hairstyle with a visor at the front, a style shared with nos. 1211 and 1212. Mecquenem took the perforations on top of the beret, which were also present on no. 1212¹², as signs of the fixture of a pointed cap, “the popular hairstyle, at that time” (he regarded no. 1216 “from the same deposit” as having this same hairstyle, despite its lack of a visor). It should be noted, however, that a visor-like projection above the forehead—minus the conical cap—is a typical feature of the Elamite male hairstyle from about 2000 BCE (e.g. Álvarez-Mon 2020: 167)¹³. Hence, another explanation for the holes, such as decorative incrustations, would be more plausible.

11. Mecquenem (1933: 7) and Amiet (1966: 440, fig. 336 a-b), however, proposed that the holes were meant for fixing clothing and headdresses.

12. Amiet (1966: 440, fig. 336 a-b) also reported a hole above the forehead of no. 1211, though it appears in photographs as merely a chip.

13. The dates throughout this article are according to the Middle Chronology.

Besides its conical cap, the oval facial structure of no. 1216 is very different to the rest of group 2 and group 1, all of which have faces that taper from a wide forehead down to a narrow chin. Its relief-outlined eyes are also unique. Its ears are large curved projections like those of the group 1 male (no. 1207), whereas the other discernible ears in group 2 are simple raised lozenges (nos. 1211 and 1212). The unusual conical cap is perhaps to be seen in connection with a corpus of terracotta mould-made figurine-plaques depicting male religious figures with tall dome-like caps, albeit much less pointy (Spycket 1992, Pls. 92-96)¹⁴. Though usually bearded, some have hairless faces, including one found in the Donjon in 1932 (Spycket 1992, no. M 20 = Mecquenem 1932, Pl. 35, bottom left; 1934b, fig. 84.1) and another in 1933 (Spycket 1992, no. 790; see also no. 791, excavated 1933, trench unknown), both attributed to the “Hammurabi” period/“20th century” (Mecquenem 1933: 8; 1934b: 234; adjusted to 18th-17th century in Amiet 1966: 303, no. 227). An alternative possibility is that no. 1216 is not Elamite at all, but was instead a later-dated object that penetrated this level during construction of the palace foundations. Albeit belonging to broken single-piece figurines, certain Seleuco-Parthian male heads from Susa also have hair-free faces, conical caps and in two cases raised modelled eye outlines (Martinez-Sève 2002, nos. 845-854, eye outlines on nos. 845-846).

The only consistent features of group 2 are a broad nose and simple curved grooves hinting at a smile. All are slightly larger than the elderly couple of group 1, ranging 5.7-6.8 cm high, except no. 1216 which is an even taller at 10.7 cm, mainly due to its tall conical headdress. Except for M 32, which has not been carefully inspected, all of the heads

14. Described as “dervishes” (Mecquenem 1934b: 234; Amiet 1966: 303, no. 227) or “clerics” (Álvarez-Mon 2020: 219, c-f).

in group 2 show evidence of having been painted (no. 1211 in fig. 5a nicely demonstrates the paint preserved in the eye areas).

In MDP 25 Mecquenem (1934b: 226) reported the find spot of the five heads (and one body) as the “lower level” of the “Elamite” phase, which also yielded “new items, such as gourds and painted bottles”¹⁵. According to the text and crudely drawn cross-section of the Donjon (reproduced here in fig. 6) this “lower level”, composed largely of “Elamite” burials, had been preserved directly below the palace, between its foundations, any material from the intervening centuries presumably having been cleared. It spanned around three metres in depth, which is designated as 0 m, down to -3.2 m.

More information, partly contradicting MDP 25, is provided by the 1933 annual report. It situates group 2 again below the palace pavement, which itself lay below an “upper level” of Sassanian and early Islamic pit burials extending from 0 m to -1.2 m (Mecquenem 1933: 7, figs. 31-32). But immediately striking is that the surface of the mound is designated as 0 m rather than the palace pavement, which is now lower at -1.20 m. Group 2 is reported in a “middle level” where (Mecquenem 1933: 7-8): “between the massifs of the foundations of the Sassanid palace we cleared several vaulted tombs from the beginning of Elam; we collected terracotta vases, terracotta figurines and in particular a collection of dolls’ heads in raw earth and terracotta [...] We had tablets of raw earth from this level; some coins including a small collection of Alexander the Great.” Notably the “Elamite” graves, now commencing at -1.2 m (the palace pavement). As demonstrated in an altered drawing of the

15. None of the heads of group 2 appear in the publication of the Donjon in MDP 29 (Mecquenem 1943), which presented only features recorded below a depth of -4-5 m.

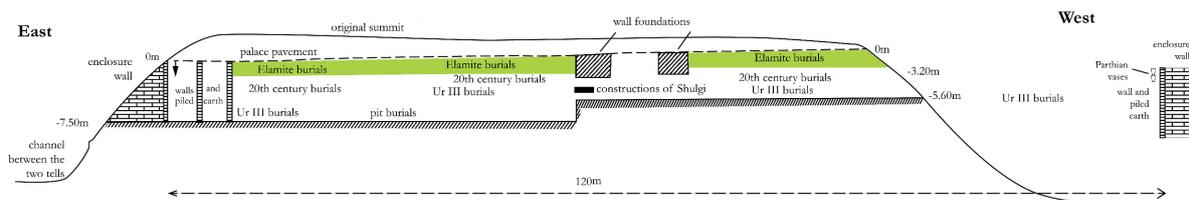


Fig. 6. Cross-section of the Donjon (after Mecquenem 1934b, fig. 73); note that the “20th century” equates to ca. 18th century BCE.

cross-section sketch [fig. 7], the “Elamite” finds still reached the same level of -3.2 m and therefore spanned a lesser total extent of two metres¹⁶.

A link between the burials and the “dolls” is not clearly expressed, but a connection may have been intended since in his annual reports Mecquenem frequently uses this kind of sentence structure, employing semi-colons to link information on burials and their contents (i.e., a reference to the type of the burial followed by a semi-colon and then typically the phrase “we found” or “we collected” and a description of the contents). He ends his sentence on burials and dolls before continuing with details of other, obviously non-funerary, finds through the level. These include coins, which are clearly intrusive, presumably as a result of stratigraphic disturbance during the laying of the palace foundations. Also worth bearing in mind is that, due to his failure to recognise any domestic structures associated with the “Elamite” graves in the Donjon (as elsewhere at the site), Mecquenem envisaged the area as a necropolis during this period and probably perceived no imperative to explicate that he was referring to grave goods. Nevertheless, since the connection is no more than an educated guess it would be unwise to overdraw the heads’ potential funerary significance¹⁷. For researchers who attempt to make use of Mecquenem’s reports, this is a level of uncertainty that far too frequently has to be navigated.

Regarding the date of the “level” in question, we have two key phrases to work with: the “lower level” of the “Elamite” phase and the “beginning

of Elam”. These can be combined with passing references to “new items, such as gourds and painted bottles” and a few archived photographs. In the cross-section plan [figs. 6-7] the “Elamite” burials, many of which were reported as tomb chambers, directly overlie a level of “20th century” burials. Across the site Mecquenem primarily identified this “20th century” level, which he associated with the “reign of Hammurabi”, by the presence of plain-walled coffins overturned on the body (for examples photographed in the Donjon in 1933, see Mecquenem 1933: 8, Pls. XXXIII, no. 49, XXXIV, nos. 50, 51). The absolute chronology of Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE) has been revised since Mecquenem’s publications, but an association with his reign is nevertheless in the ballpark, plus or minus a century or so. A coffin of Mecquenem’s distinctive “20th century” type excavated at Tell ed-Der in Mesopotamia is well-dated to ca. 1825-1800 BCE (Gasche 2000: 73-74, pl. 36, T.164, dates adjusted to Middle Chronology), and the various descriptions, photographs and sketches of the “20th century” level suggest a concentration of Sukkalmah period material extending up to around the early 17th century BCE.

It is approximately at this time—the early 17th century BCE—that we must situate the commencement of the “lower level” of the “Elamite” phase/“beginning of Elam” typified by the presence of vaulted tombs. A marked increase in tomb chamber use can be clearly witnessed in the late 18th and particularly the 17th century BCE in the better-documented Ville Royale A (VR A) trench at the northern end of Susa excavated by Roman Ghirshman between 1946 and 1966 (for an overview of Ghirshman’s excavations at Susa see Gasche 2009). Hermann Gasche (2000: 44) observed that in the large residential area uncovered in the VR A, vaulted tombs first appeared in level XIV, which dates to ca. 1740-1640 BCE, and they

16. The MDP text (Mecquenem 1934b: 226) gives another slightly different level of -7.6 m, which does in fact agree with the drawing in the 1933 annual report (Mecquenem 1933, fig. 18).

17. Amiet and Spycket, who both had access to records of excavations at Susa held by the Louvre, do not seem to have had any additional information regarding the find contexts of the heads.

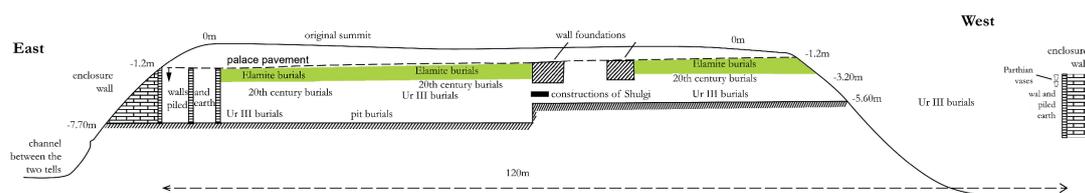


Fig. 7. Cross-section of the Donjon modified to reflect the levels stated in the 1933 annual report for the mound surface, the palace pavement, and the lowest extent of the excavations (20 cm lower at -7.7 m) (modified after Mecquenem 1934b, fig. 73); note that the “20th century” equates to ca. 18th century BCE.

had become the most common burial type by level VR A XII, which extends from perhaps around 1600 BCE down into the Middle Elamite period at around 1450 BCE (absolute chronology of levels following Gasche 2013: 79, see Middle Chronology dates in brackets)¹⁸.

References to “gourds and painted bottles” also support a Sukkalmah to early Middle Elamite date range for Mecquenem’s earlier “Elamite” level. The gourds in question are of a distinctive Elamite type found from VR A XV (ca. 1800-1740 BCE; absolute chronology following Gasche 2013: 79, see Middle Chronology dates in brackets) up to at least VR A XII (Gasche 1973, group 13, Pl. 15). In a collation of typical Sukkalmah period material, Elizabeth Carter (1984, fig. 10, nos. 10, 19, 20, 25) presents examples of these vessels from Susa, Deh Luran, Tall-e Ghazir, Mound B, and Malyan. An archived photograph of 1932 shows one of Mecquenem’s “Elamite” gourds [fig. 8, top left], and it is a near-exact match with one published from A XII (Gasche 1973, Pl. 60.1, GS-4885). For the bottles, we may contemplate two “painted Elamite bottles” also photographed in 1932 [fig. 8, top right], one decorated with solid triangles, the other with a hatched shoulder panel and hatched triangles, and a third bottle published in 1934 from an “Elamite” tomb (Mecquenem 1934b, fig. 78.2). Even if the very narrow-necked globular forms are atypical of the various painted pottery styles in the Zagros mountains, the decorations on them appear to be related to the geometric designs found on pottery in Fars, particularly on late Kaftari/Qaleh wares (ca. 1600-1300 BCE). Their presence at Susa in “Elamite” tombs can be viewed alongside the appearance of painted pottery, particularly with hatched designs, in the Sukkalmah to early Middle Elamite VR A levels XIV-XII (Gasche 1973, Pl. 16.4, 5, 7, 21.27, 30.3-6), and at Haft Tappeh in building levels II-IV (together producing radiocarbon dates spanning ca. 1525-1395 BCE; Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2016: 98, vessels in fig. 56.6-8)

Of particular interest is a photograph of one of the tombs excavated in the Donjon in the “lower level” of the “Elamite” phase in the same season as the group 2 heads [fig. 8, bottom]. The

tomb appears to be in an almost-cleared state with three ledge-shouldered jars or goblets still resting in situ. These vessels belong to group 21, variant b, in Gasche’s (1973) study of Elamite pottery and find comparisons with stump/string-cut base vessels in VR A XIII (cf. Gasche 1973, Pl. 22, nos. 22, 25) and disc or button base vessels in VR A XIII to XI (cf. Gasche 1973: Pl. 22, nos. 2, 3, 16, 19), which together span approximately 1675 BCE to 1200 BCE (dates following Gasche 2013: 79, see Middle Chronology dates in brackets). Carter (1971, fig. 18.6, 7; 1984, fig. 11, nos. 4, 17) assigned these vessels to a ca. 1600-1300 BCE “Transitional phase” between the Sukkalmah and Middle Elamite periods, while Behzad Mofidi-Nasrabadi (2016: 98, fig. 48, especially no. 10) published a related form with a less defined shoulder at Haft Tappeh in building level IV, which provided radiocarbon dates of ca. 1435-1395 BCE. Since the vessels in question were deposited very consistently at Susa in assemblages of tomb chambers cut from early and late VR A XII (Gasche 2000: 233-35, 244-54, tombs S. 40, S.41, S. 135, S.34, S.110, S.111, S.115, S.117, S.116, shown in pls. 118, no. 5. 119, nos. I-II, 128, no. 2, 129, without no., 131, no. 7, 132, no. 9, 133, nos. 1-2134, no. 5567, 135, nos. 1-6), the Donjon tomb shown here is probably contemporary with these VR A XII tombs; in other words, it should date to ca. 1600-1450 BCE.

All together the evidence suggests that the “lower level” of the “Elamite” phase that yielded the group 2 heads and body would have broadly spanned the 17th to the 15th century, which overlaps with much of Carter’s “Transitional” phase. Consequently, the ca. 15th century BCE date assigned to the group in the 1933 inventory report remains plausible enough. Certainly, stylistic considerations make a reasonable case for the dating of the figurines to sometime around the mid-second millennium BCE. Pierre Amiet (1966: 440-43, nos. 336-338) placed nos. 1211, 1213 and 1216 in the 12th century BCE, but offered no compelling reason to adopt such a late date.

Group 3, nos. 1209, 1213, 1214 and 1215

Four small heads of articulated figurines, nos. 1209, 1213, 1214 and 1215 [fig. 9], coming from unknown locations at Susa were connected by Spycket (1992: 194-95) to those already discussed. No. 1209 was excavated in 1932 (Spycket 1992: 194, Pl. 138) but

18. Level XII yielded texts impressed with a seal of Kuk-Nashur III (or IV?) (Potts 2016: 162), and in the upper part of the level a legal text impressed with seal of early Middle Elamite ruler Kidinu was recovered (Steve, Gasche and De Meyer 1980: 92).

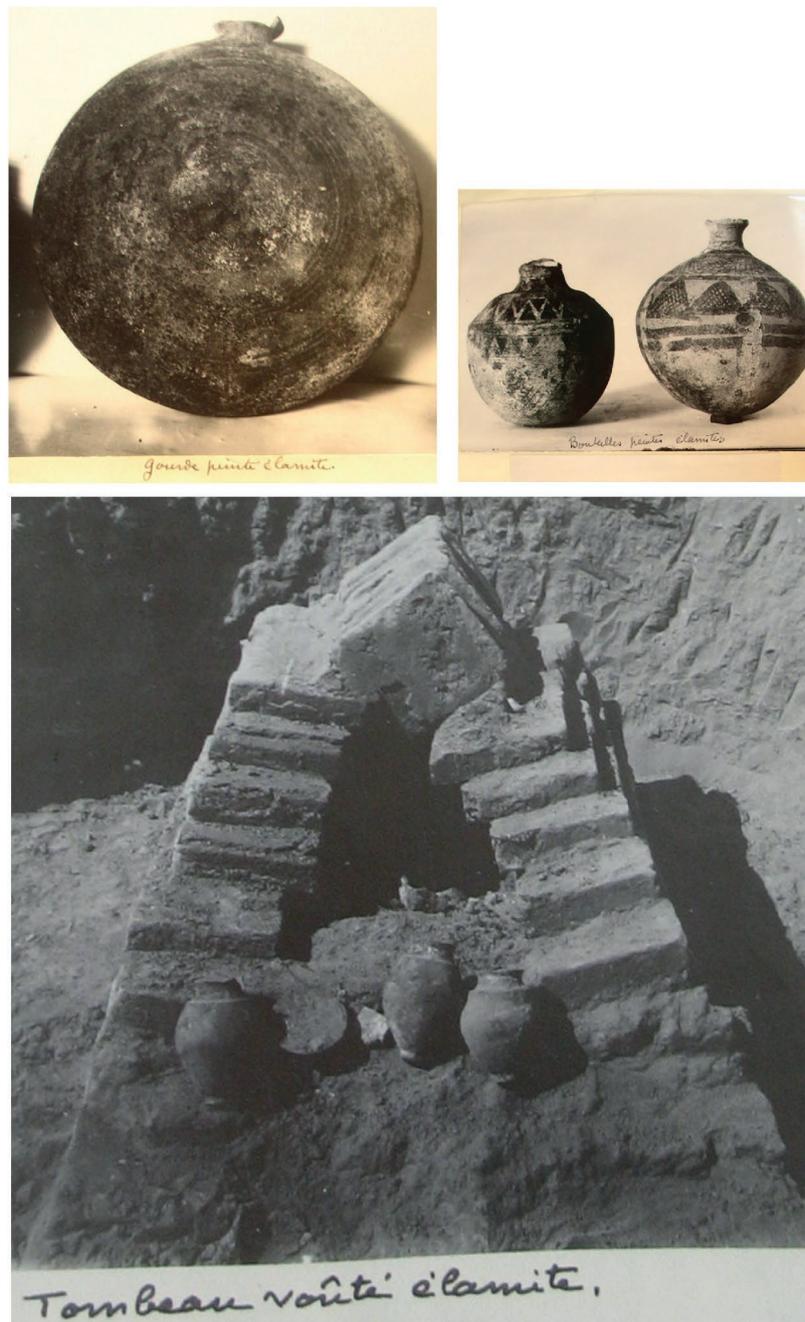


Fig. 8. Top left: “Elamite” gourd (after Mecquenem 1932, Pl. 37, top); top right: “Elamite” painted bottles (after Mecquenem 1932, Pl. 36 top); bottom: “Elamite” tomb with vessels in situ (after Mecquenem 1933, Pl. 29, no. 40).

does not appear in the annual report. No. 1215 was excavated in 1934 (Spycket 1992: 195, Pl. 140) and is not mentioned in the annual report either, but it does appear in a photograph captioned as an Ur III (“23rd century”) head made in bitumen, presumably due to its blackened surface (Mecquenem 1934a, Pl. 7, top right). The excavation year/s of nos. 1213 (Spycket 1992: 195, Pl. 140)¹⁹ and 1214

19. Also published in Amiet 1966: 443, no. 338; Spycket 1981: 316, n. 108.

(Spycket 1992: 195, Pl. 140) are unknown. Only no. 1213 bears any real resemblance to the heads of groups 1 and 2, but in any case they are united by their function, since all seem to have been intended for fixture onto the body (nos. 1213 and 1214 have pierced hollow necks). All are typified by a be-ret-like hairstyle, one of which is coated in bitumen (no. 1209) and another perforated on top like some of the previous (no. 1213). The eyes are either outlined by grooves (no. 1213), shell-like in appearance

(no. 1214) or not visible at all (nos. 1209, 1215), and where present the ears are pinched and crescent-shaped (nos. 1209, 1203). A beard is depicted on nos. 1209 and 1215 (composed of four obliquely hatched bands), and probably also 1214.

To the heads of this and the previous two groups, Spycket (1981: 317; 1992: 192, Pl. 136, no. 1204) linked a slightly larger (h. 8.1 cm) unbaked clay female head from neighbouring Chogha Zanbil with a narrow, tenon-like neck suggesting it too was designed to fit into a body [fig. 10a]²⁰. It depicts a female with incised eyes, long eyelashes and a plaited, crown-like hairstyle. As for the female head no. 1208, Spycket (1992: 191) connected this hairstyle to those on Middle Elamite nude female figurines and 20. Spycket (1981: 317) was explicit in making this connection: “A female head from Chogha Zanbil, although the neck is not perforated, is the female counterpart of these grotesque figures from Susa”.

on a series of larger Middle Elamite female funerary heads. Its function was undoubtedly votive, since it was recovered from the temple of Pinikir in excavations of 1958-59 (Ghirshman 1968: 13, Pls. X.1, LXX).

Finally, Mecquenem (1934b: 234) also drew a comparison between no. 1208 and a small, probably female, bitumen head (h. 3.9 cm) excavated in an unknown context in the Acropole at Susa (Pottier 1912: 62-63, fig. 186; also Pézard and Pottier 1926, no. 213) [fig. 10b]. It has a chignon hairstyle, triangular face, large oval ears, ocular cavities (one still encrusted with a shell lozenge) with thick, raised outlines, a large, straight nose, a small, slightly V-shaped mouth, receding chin, and engraved lines on the neck (skin folds, wrinkles or necklaces?). A jagged edge at the bottom of the neck indicates that the head did not belong to an articulated figurine but



Fig. 9. Modelled heads from Susa (locations unknown): no. 1209 - National Museum of Iran, no. unknown, field inv. N 636, pink terracotta head, light yellow slip, bitumen on beret and beard, h. 6.2 cm (image courtesy J. Álvarez-Mon); no. 1213 - Louvre Museum, no. Sb 6620, field inv. unknown, roughly modelled, under-fired, pink terracotta head, hollow neck not completely perforated by a hole in front and behind, four fine perforations on top, h. 7.9 cm (images modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127592>); no. 1214 - National Museum of Iran, no. and field inv. unknown, roughly modelled, grey-pink terracotta head, hollow neck perforated by three or four large side holes, h. 7.7 cm (after Spycket 1992, Pl. 140); no. 1215 - National Museum of Iran, no. unknown, field inv. R 354, pink terracotta head, blackened, h. 5.5 cm (after Spycket 1992, Pl. 140).

had broken off a single-piece model. Furthermore, it appears to be much earlier in date²¹.

Significance

Ancient Near Eastern societies, including Elam, produced significant numbers of figurines in non-perishable materials, particularly clay²², and undoubtedly many more in organic materials that have been lost. In most cases, the questions of who made them, what they meant, and how they were used are still debated. Some of the varied interpretations of figurines around the world include their use as toys and objects of everyday life, venues for the ancestral spirits, representations of idealized categories, and portraits of particular individuals in the community (Marcus 2019: 1). Due to their poor documentation, it is very difficult to properly con-

21. Pottier (1912: 62) dated this head to the Early Dynastic III period, counting it amongst a series of sculptures that he connected to the “second style” of Susian pottery. Connan and Deschesne (1996: 190-91, no. 120) instead proposed a date of ca. 2300 BCE noting that the same style of chignon was worn by Akkadian men; however, given its similarities with our heads they could not rule out a later second millennium BCE date.

22. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines were made in most regions and periods of the ancient Near East from the Neolithic period onward, and frequently appear in volumes of small finds of various sites (Sakal 2018: 221).

textualise any of the articulated terracotta figurines at Susa; in other words, to study them as unique cultural expressions based on evidence from their contexts of recovery and as embodiments of social values (e.g. Lesure 2011: 5).

Compounding the problems of recording, these modelled anthropomorphic clay figurines with separately made parts were clearly exceptional productions and have no clear inter-site or cross-cultural analogies. By and large, after a period of popularity in the second half of the third millennium BCE, hand-modelled terracotta figurines disappeared in the second millennium BCE at Susa, as well as in southern Mesopotamia (Sakal 2018: 227). By way of external comparisons, Spycket (1992: 192) noted only a 4.1 cm high modelled male head from Ur with summarily rendered features including large trumpet-shaped ears and beret-like headgear, noting the closeness of these features to our no. 1207²³. However, this head seems to have broken off a single-piece figurine and its context of use and even its date are unknown (Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 182, 224, Pl. 91, no. 254, U.6528, Baghdad, IM 1532).

23. My own scan through volumes of excavated 2nd millennium material from several Mesopotamian sites (Ur, Nippur, Babylon, Telloh, Isin, Larsa) and the Diyala came up with no other separately made modelled heads of articulated figurines that showed obviously similarities.



Fig. 10. a) no. 1204 – modelled grey unbaked clay female head with neck-tenon from Chogha Zanbil, Louvre Museum, no. Sb 5130, field inv. GTZ 870, h. 8.1 cm (image modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127587>); b) bitumen mastic head of a figurine, Louvre Museum, no. Sb 14238, h. 3.9 cm (image modified from <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010127986>).

Considered a form of popular art, our unusual articulated figurines with individualised faces have been described as “singularly expressive” (Spycket 1981: 316) and “astonishing” (Amiet 1966: 391). The rendering of distinctive, realistic features, especially on the elderly couple (nos. 1207-1208), suggests an intention to represent faces of specific people. In this sense, they are antithetical to the popular contemporary mould-made figurine-plaques representing generic types—the kind of images that could be described as “materializations of idealized or projected types rather than direct reflections of reality” (for which see Nakamura and Meskell 2009: 227). While previous commentators perceive the attempt to capture traits we tend to regard as imperfections, particularly those related to ageing, as a deliberate production of grotesque “dolls”, expressing humour or tragedy (e.g. Amiet 1966: 391; Spycket 1992: 192)²⁴, the images could conversely be seen as affectionate, if simplistic, reproductions of real-life individuals with particular attention to culturally defined elements such as hair or headdresses to ensure recognition of their social identities.

In terms of their function, as tempting as it may be to conceive their detachable, moveable parts as evidence for use in child’s play, the viewing of human figurines as toys through a modern cultural filter is best avoided (e.g. Moorey 2003: 7). Amongst the myriad of other possibilities are, for example, votive or ritual use. It seems that at least two came from a grave, but it is important not to overstate the funerary significance of the entire corpus, or even a common function, in the absence of contextual information. Even if it were possible to prove that they had all come from burials, they would still represent a rather exceptional genre of grave good, since human models are generally few and far between in funerary contexts of historical periods at Susa and its surrounds²⁵.

24. Spycket (1992: 316) felt that the conical headdress of no. 1216 gave it a comical aspect, a view that is clearly informed by the typical modern clown costume.

25. There are very rare finds of figurines in the Middle Elamite funerary record at Susa. In the Apadana, for example, figurines of three naked females holding their breasts, a lute player, and a bed were deposited with a child vessel burial under the central court (Mecquenem 1922: 6, fig. 16) and a broken nude female figurine was deposited in a late Middle Elamite vaulted tomb (no. 833, trench 830) housing three adult (?) individuals under the eastern portico of the hypostyle hall (Ladiray 2010: 202-203). Another female figurine can be noted in

One notable exception are the abovementioned modelled and painted clay funerary heads placed in the graves of certain individuals at Susa from around the mid-second millennium BCE. Unlike the small separately made heads made for attachment to a body, these larger, sometimes life-size, heads seem to have been made simply as busts, although they did have hollow necks allowing them to be mounted if desired. Yet it is difficult to assess how common even these heads had actually been. Ghirshman (1962: 150; Ghirshman and Stève 1966: 9) judged that they were extremely rare and that their use must have been exceptional, although this may have been sheer accident of discovery, since elsewhere on the site Mecquenem asserted that they were a frequent occurrence, but being made in unbaked clay were generally crushed or deformed and difficult to save (Mecquenem 1929-30: 86; 1943: 53; 1943-44: 139; for discussion see Wicks 2021). Which kinds of people at Susa were buried with these realistic individualized heads and why remains a matter of much speculation (see various proposals in Mecquenem 1929-30: 86; 1931: 334; Ghirshman 1962: 150; Spycket 1992: 135; Álvarez-Mon 2005: 121; Carter 2011: 49; Wicks 2019: 141). While our pair of articulated figurines said to have been found in a grave in the Donjon mound give the impression of a rather different function to the funerary heads, their individual features, particularly their characteristics of old age, do compel us to see them as representations of specific (deceased?) people²⁶.

a Middle Elamite vaulted tomb (B1) with a mirror and flint arrowheads at Tall-e Ghazir, Mound B, level 2, on the Ram Hormuz plain (Alizadeh 2014: 18).

26. Perhaps they were made specifically for ritual use associated with the funeral or even later for an exorcism-type ritual. In Mesopotamia we hear of the deposition of figurines representing dead people in the tomb of their family, or even of another family, as a kind of post-mortem adoption (Bottéro 1992: 285; Scurlock 2006: 22, 50–52). Or the use of figurines as substitute humans to placate ghosts, as in the case of a reed figurine given as a substitute wife to the dead husband of an afflicted woman (Scurlock 2006: 50, text 220). It has to be noted, however, that there is very little evidence for the exorcism text genre at Susa, and therefore beliefs about malicious behaviour of ghosts may have been far less invasive than in Mesopotamia (Wicks 2019: 173-74).

Concluding Note: Reflecting on the Value of the Mecquenem Archives for the Study of Elamite Collections

This article has frequently made recourse to the short reports sent by Roland de Mecquenem to the French Ministry of Public Instruction at the end of each of his excavation campaigns carried out at Susa and its surrounds in 1912-1914 and 1921-1939. In 2011, the archives containing these reports and additional resources including photographs, plans and object inventories, were made available online with a searchable database allowing data query operations such as simple statistical analyses. As noted on the webpage of the sponsor of this endeavour, the Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications, the reports “partly make up for the deficiencies, frequently underlined, of the excavator's publications”, and “unlike the broad syntheses he published, his reports were written at the end of each mission. They thus more reliably trace the evolution of sites open between 1912 and 1939 and shed new light on some of them that Mecquenem considered unproductive and that he did not mention in his publications”²⁷. After attempting to wring information out of the Mecquenem archives over the course of almost a decade since their publication, the present author is acutely aware of the flaws and inconsistencies in the documentation, and the frustration involved in trying to reconcile its content with information in Mecquenem's other published contributions to the official MDP volumes and various journal articles. Nevertheless, they can sometimes prove to be a goldmine. This is particularly true for the photographs, which often show the archaeological finds in situ. As a publicly available resource, they should be consulted wherever possible—albeit with caution—by scholars and students interested in researching lowland Elamite material culture.

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