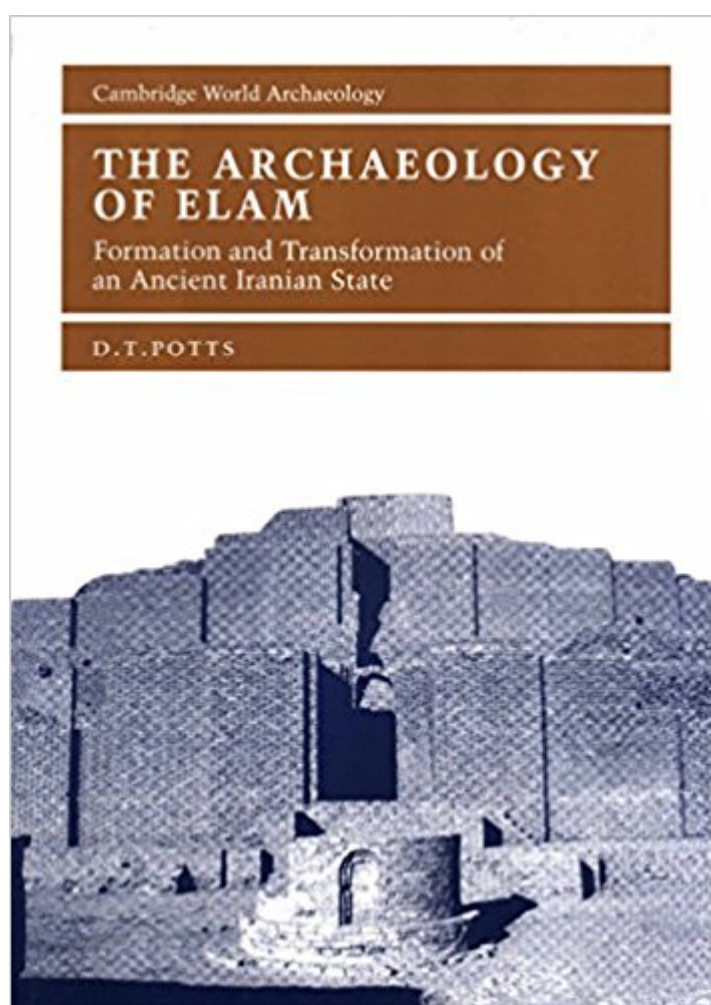


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The Archaeology Of Elam: Formation And Transformation Of An Ancient Iranian State (Cambridge World Archaeology)



Synopsis

Few of the major peoples of the ancient Near East have been as little studied as the Elamites, a disparate collection of people living in what is today southwestern Iran, and yet few had such an impact on the course of history from c. 2600 BC to the first centuries AD. As the first synthesis of Elamite archaeology to appear in English in over fifteen years, this volume will serve as a major resource for all scholars, students and laypeople interested in the ancient Near East.

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Customer Reviews

"...a very valuable study." Choice

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Elam is another of those ancient empires that you do not hear about much. Professor Potts gives a thorough look at Elamites and their history. I am glad I added this to my library on ancient history.

Its great

I bought this book a few years ago about the elusive state of Elam which is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament intending to satisfy my curiosity about where it was and when it emerged from the distant mists of time. Elam, It turned out occupied the foothills and plains on the southwestern flank of the Zagros Mountains in the provinces of Luristan, Khuzistan, Bushehr, and Fars and it emerged much earlier than I expected. It was clearly the intention of the author, D T Potts, to pull together as much of the relevant sources of information and research as possible about the origin and historical footprint of the state of Elam. In a short concise preface he explains the rationale for his book by declaring that *“this is explicitly a work of synthesis which wholeheartedly embraces the tenets of histoire totale and that he “has striven to cover all periods in Elamite history using all types of available evidence, whether architectural, ceramic, numismatic, radiometric, epigraphic, literary, environmental, religious, ethnographic, etc.”* The contents of the book are as follows: Chapter 1 Elam, what when, where? Chapter 2 Environment, climate and resources Chapter 3 The immediate precursors of Elam 4300-2900BC Chapter 4 Elam and Awan 2900-2100BC Chapter 5 The dynasty of Shimaski 2094-1940BC Chapter 6 The grand regents of Elam and Susa 1932-1600BC Chapter 7 The kingdom of Susa and Anshan 1600-1100BC Chapter 8 The Neo-Elamite period 1000-539BC Chapter 9 Elam in the Achaemenid empire 539-331BC Chapter 10 Elymais 323BC-AD234 Chapter 11 Elam under the Sassanians and beyond Chapter 12 Conclusions For me the preface and the first three chapters were very important to understand since they provided the groundwork for the following seven chapters. They enabled me to understand why Elam existed as a separate state at all, and why it was quite separate (for much of the time) from the organized cities of Mesopotamia. What I was reading about was a state whose boundaries were rather elastic & with the inhabitants quite independent some of the time, but under outside rulers (mainly Mesopotamian) at others. There were basically two separate centres which were far removed from one another and which over the centuries waxed and waned in complexity. One of these was Susa in Khuzistan Province which was close to what later became the “Royal Road”. The other was Malwan (or Anshan) a distance of some 400km to the southeast of Susa, which was located in the remoter highlands of Fars Province. Both were medium sized urban centres and both were surrounded by tribes of pastoral mountain men who also practiced subsistence farming wherever they could. The sources for the early period up to about 2100 BC are mainly archaeological, and many of the excavations of this early period were done at a time before the rigorous procedures of the modern era were in place, and not to mention the loss of archaeological

objects being misplaced or lost due to the incessant wars of the region from then until modern times. So it is easy to see why there are so many different theories and interpretations of the extant evidence for this early period as well as for the 1500 years or so before the emergence of the states of classical antiquity. The author thoroughly examines the available evidence at what are deemed to be the most important sites of each period, and clearly states the arguments, assumptions, and interpretations put forward by proponents of the various theories and hypotheses which are often inconsistent and contradictory. He then does a masterly job of comparing and contrasting these and shows in a measured way what evidence and interpretations he believes can be relied upon and what conclusions may be based upon insufficient evidence or be biased due to unwarranted assumptions. Because of the complexity of the subject matter it would take too long to provide a detailed review of the contents of the book other than this brief summary of the history of Elam. The Elamite state seems to have emerged out from under the subservience to Mesopotamia rulers with the dynasty of Shimaski (2094-1940BC) and reached its peak under of the Grand Regents of Elam and Susa (1932-1600BC). During the kingdom of Susa and Anshan (1600-1100BC) which was a period of relatively short lived dynasties it was vying for supremacy with other neighbouring states whose fortunes waxed and waned along with theirs. In the following Neo-Elamite period (1000-539BC) we are entering the period of Assyrian dominance of the whole of the Middle East which was then followed by the emergence of Persian influence under the early Achaemenids. Elam under the Achaemenid empire (539-331BC) was slowly subsumed into the larger state and although its citizens may have retained some distinctive ethnistic characteristics, it loses its status as an independent state and becomes a province of a greater whole. The book is a very scholarly and is replete with references from original sources, such as inscriptions, ancient historians, and the works, hypotheses and interpretations of a large number of scholars of the last 150-175 years. It is lavishly endowed with some 90 illustrations, 40 plates, and over 60 tables which provide useful summaries on the text. In addition there is a large reference section containing 35 pages of bibliography of other scholarly works, and a ten page index. Each chapter includes a brief overview of the content of the chapter, and a detailed map of the major sites referred to in that chapter. I bought the soft cover edition of the book and found it somewhat hard to read, mainly because the references are embodied within the text rather as a list of notes in a separate section. I did make an attempt at one point to determine how many notes there are on an average page and the best I can say is there were usually about 20 per page (or one every two or three lines or so). The maps were in black and white, and somewhat hard to read due to the lack of contrast in the relief areas in particular. As a result I often had to use a magnifying glass to identify various sites, which I needed

to do in order to keep track of the plethora of confusing place names and their proximity to other neighbouring sites which often had similar names. But these are quibbles.I read this book at least three times before I felt that I was ready to write a review of it. The time I spent on the final reading was over 100 hours over a period of the seven months. The good news was that while the chapters are historically in sequence, they can each probably be read in isolation as long as you have retained sufficient knowledge of the earlier chapters and can branch back to those if necessary. I also did a thorough search of the web to see what is available about Elam, and found a number of useful articles by other scholars and list two of them here: i. Françoise Vallat The history of Elam. ii. Elizabeth Carter The archeology of Elam. I should also note that the 2nd edition of this book was published in November 12, 2015 (ISBN-13: 978-1107476639) Did I achieve my objectives in reading this book. I can definitely say yes to that, but it took me much longer than I expected to reach the end. Would I recommend it to other readers? – Yes, but only if you are looking for a detailed study rather than an overview. I give it 5 stars.

This is a well designed and well produced textbook, which seems to have been organised with students and teachers in mind. Potts has given us a cohesive and logically developed narrative; a big advance on the two chapters by the late Renée Labat in the 3rd edition of the Cambridge Ancient History. Pott's aim has been "to provide a cogent, readable synthesis of Elam" (p. xxi). And he has achieved this admirably. Features of the text of the book are the summaries at the beginning of each chapter ('text boxes'), the clear site maps for each chapter, and the chronological outlines. All very useful. The book is cultural and historical as well as archaeological in character and in its emphasis. The contents deal with pottery, seals, sculpture, glyptic art, rock reliefs, the texts of clay documents, inscriptions, architecture, site plans, ivories, coins, figurines, burials and grave goods. Comprehensiveness and scope are notable marks of this book, in the search for the origins and the influence of Elam. It covers its pre-history (c. late fifth millennium B.C.) and continues all the way to the eighth century A.D. In this volume, Elam and the Elamites are dealt with as a polity in their own right, and not merely seen as a troublesome heterogeneous nation in relation to its neighbours, the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians. Potts stresses the chameleon-like character ("transformations") of Elam over the centuries, as viewed through the lens of contrasting if not conflicting sources of evidence. He argues that *courte durée*, rather than *longue durée*, is the historical concept which best helps to account for the periodic changes which characterised the history of Elam. Despite the incompleteness of the data, Potts has succeeded in bringing Elam and its people into sharper focus than has hitherto been the case. It is a worthy successor to Carter and

Stolper's *Elam: Surveys of Political History and Archaeology* (1984), which was probably the best synthesis of that land and its culture before the advent of the present volume. Professor Potts is to be congratulated on his achievement. Particularly on his desire to communicate the results of his research to his readers in a format and language which strive to make the significance of these results clear and intelligible. This new work should become a standard text in the hands of teaching staff and students alike in tertiary institutions for some time to come. The illustrations and plates are clear, relevant and help to elucidate the text and its interpretation. A copious 35 page bibliography and a generally adequate index round off the volume.

While Elam civilization looks as not important or as a minor one for many other historians, Mr. Potts created a great book about these forgotten ancient Iranian people. I enjoyed reading the book a lot. Thank you for your great courage. I hope you will continue this great job by writing a book about the Medes. That is also a forgotten civilization.

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