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Iranian Long Spouted Vessels of the Third and Second Millennium BCE: Contextualizing an Enigmatic Vessel

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Undergraduate

**Long Spouted Vessels of the Third and Second Millennium
BCE: Contextualizing an Enigmatic Vessel
Reflective Essay**

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Editor's note: this paper is being submitted for publication in scholarly journals and is thus withheld from this paper series. An abstract of the research follows the reflective essay.

Reflective Essay: My passion for archaeology began my first quarter when I took an Iranian archaeology class. This quarter set the foundation for my learning and encouraged me to enroll in a class with Dr. Li Min on the *Archaeological Landscapes of China*. A requirement of the class was to complete a class project, and I approached Dr. Li about the possibility of exploring interactions between China and Iran. He was supportive of this idea, and sent me off to the library to search for books. Together, sifting through sources, we found a picture of a long spouted Iranian bronze vessel from the third millennium BCE that was similar to a Chinese vessel from the same period. We were both curious if these similarities were more than just a coincidence, and he encouraged me to investigate the connection. A year later I am still working with Dr. Li in a joint effort to link these vessels, and wrote the accompanying paper in his graduate seminar this last fall.

Beginning this research also marked the beginning of my engagement with the UCLA library. As a transfer student I was not fully aware of the resources available, and had to ask the front desk how to find “the books”. Luckily, during that winter quarter, Dr. Zoe Borovsky visited one of my classes and introduced me to the library catalog, online journal databases, and Zotero. Dr. Su Chen also offered her expertise on the East Asian library collection. Together their help was a catalyst to begin my own research.

Knowledge in hand, I set off to search for books on Bronze Age Iran. I began with the excavation reports on the site of Susa, which I found in the stacks. I then widened my search by browsing the books that sat next to these reports on the shelf. This increased my sites and vessels from one to a handful. As I found vessels, I

mapped the site location in Google Earth and created a chronological and spatial sequence. This allowed me to visualize the possible diffusion routes that ancient peoples took. This exploration was furthered during Dr. Li's graduate seminar in the digital commons area of YRL, where we utilized the big screen to project Google Maps and discuss these connection hypotheses.

As an image of connectivity across western Asia began to form, I needed to understand the existing scholarship on these trade patterns. I used *Jstor* through my proxy server access, to find articles that explained this theoretical framework. From these articles' bibliographies I generated lists of possible books, articles, and digital resources that would be valuable. I began to feel more comfortable with the subject matter, and realized that the vessel's usage had been understudied and that this should be the focus of my paper. As I traveled this path, Dr. Elizabeth Carter and Dr. Ali Mousavi from the NELC department assisted in pointing me to resources I had overlooked. Dr. Carter's suggestion to look at Irene Winter's work on the Royal Cemetery at Ur turned into a crucial element in my paper. Dr. Richard Lesure in the Anthropology department also lent me his time to help me envision a vessel typology.

As I exhausted my resources in the stacks, I expanded my sources to the Arts library, SRLF, and ILL. The use of *Melvyl* became more crucial as I came across rare sources. However, I was always pleasantly surprised to find that most of the books were in the UC system. I began to find sources in Russian, French and German and the holes in my research began to close. Information on vessels at the sites without

publications in English suddenly became available to me by using the library catalog's subject list, and my research began to come into view.

Now the paper is written, but the research is not done. Instead, it is a launching point for the next stage of both my research and life. As I near graduation I reflect positively on the hours I spent in the research library where now, like the TV show *Cheers*, all the staff at the front desk knows my name. I cannot help but to smile when I run across a new researcher who is just starting this journey. I try to lend them a few words of advice, knowledge, and then point them to the directory of librarians who I know will be eager to help.

Abstract: Long spouted vessels have a long tradition on the Iranian Plateau that spans the millennia. Well known from the Iron Age in northern Iran their context outside of this regional time frame, to date, has been understudied. This paper is part of a multi-stage research project, which aims to understand their evolution and possible ritual function both inside and outside of Iran. In this paper I present the initial data collection and findings of this research. Using previously published excavation reports, I trace these vessel's location, material composition, and grave context. From these data I find that the long-spouted morphology has been present on the Iranian plateau since the 4th millennium BCE, and were present in Iran, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia during the 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE. I also examine their possible ritual function by looking at their representation in figural art. These data will be used in further research where I will investigate if these vessels represent a continuation of shared ritual between these regional centers.