

No Place Like Home

Ancient Near Eastern Houses and Households

Edited by

Laura Battini, Aaron Brody and Sharon R. Steadman

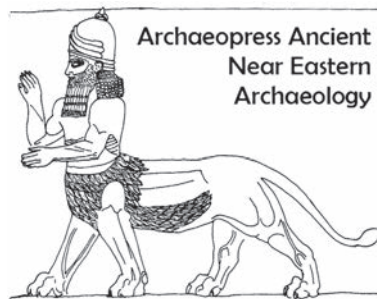


ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG
www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-156-9
ISBN 978-1-80327-157-6 (e-Pdf)

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Chapter 1.

Introduction:

No Place Like Home

Laura Battini, Aaron Brody, and Sharon R. Steadman

The idea for this edited volume emerged from the collaboration between the three editors who chaired three years (six sessions) of 'Household Archaeology in the Ancient Near East' sessions at the American Schools of Overseas Research meetings (ASOR 2017-2019). These sessions were hugely popular. After the very first session the chairs were approached by three separate publishing agencies asking them to submit the papers for publication. We followed through with one (Steadman and Brody 2018); those papers are not included here. The quality of scholarship remained equally high, and fascinating in subsequent sessions, and attendance was phenomenal. Household archaeology is, in many ways, at the heart of any excavation that includes residential areas, whether in a city or a small village. The methodology employed at one specific archaeological setting is often suitable for use in many others; the results from one set of methodologies regularly provide new avenues of interpretation for archaeologists working in a variety of settings.

Household archaeology, launched as a subfield nearly a half century ago (e.g., Clarke 1972; Flannery and Winter 1976) and was firmly entrenched by the early 1980s (Deetz 1982; Netting *et al.* 1984; Wilk and Rathje 1982; for a brief history of the household archaeology subfield, see Steadman 2015: 163-168). It is one of only a handful of subfields in archaeology that comprises 'transferable knowledge' across geographical regions and community settings. A journal article on the household archaeological project at a Mesoamerican site may be read as widely by archaeologists working on the Asian or African continents, or in Europe, as it is by Mesoamericanists, and vice versa. It is not surprising, therefore, that methodologies from this subfield were soon to be employed in Near Eastern contexts (e.g., Banning and Byrd 1987); since then a compendium of studies have appeared in countless journals and a growing number of edited volumes (e.g., Mas and Notizia 2020; Müller 2015; Parker and Foster 2012; Yasur-Landau *et al.* 2011, to name but a few). This volume joins this growing literature on the study of households across the breadth of southwestern Asia and Egypt. It is intended to offer new perspectives in view of a greater contextuality (Hodder 2009) and more in-depth and methodologically based socio-economic analyses (Liverani 2014). Beyond comparative studies, it must not be forgotten that the subject of archaeological

research is a precise society, at a definite time, in a specific environmental and socio-economic situation: the house and the way living spaces are historically, biologically, and socially conditioned (Liverani 2016; Margueron 1982, 1996; Zevi 1956, 1997).

For those who want to undertake studies on the household it is therefore essential to start from what has already been defined as the 'materiality of architecture.' Following the research of Christopher Tilley (2004) and Tim Ingold (2007), the materiality of architecture consists of the real, technical, and material elements that make up a building. This avenue of research takes scholars beyond the architectural 'plan' provided in archaeological reports. The built space is three-dimensional and the only way to experience it and make it your own is by walking through this space from the inside (Zevi 1956). This creation of a third dimension, that is still largely lacking in the ancient Near East, is a critical research step (Margueron 1986). Following similar procedures by historians who restore partially corrupted texts, and pottery specialists who reconstruct the initial shape of a broken vessel, architecture needs reconstructions, which are hypothetical but the only way to understand ancient space as a three-dimensional space. Only in this way can knowledge advance.

With the idea of advancing household archaeology in these research directions, the three editors saw an excellent opportunity for collaboration given that our fields, while all related to Near Eastern Archaeology, offered coverage of a variety of regions including Anatolia (Steadman), the Levant (Brody), and Mesopotamia (Battini). Indeed, the papers presented in the ASOR meetings spanned these regions and included Egypt. Immediately after the conclusion of the third year's sessions, we invited all authors (excepting those in the Steadman and Brody [2018] *Near Eastern Archaeology* theme issue), to contribute to this volume. Many authors had already pursued publication of their work elsewhere. In addition to the ASOR presenters, the co-editors solicited contributions from a few additional scholars whose body of work was precisely on point with the volume's goals. Several accepted the offer and their work can be found in this volume. Chapters in the volume feature studies of households on the central Anatolian plateau and in southeastern Anatolia

and Mesopotamia, as well as eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus. A number of chapters represent Levantine studies, and several offer insights into Egyptian households through the ages. The Arabian peninsula is represented by a study focused on a site in Oman.

Once the book was assembled, it became clear that the 16 chapters fell rather naturally into three of the critical areas to which household archaeology so usefully contributes: social structure; activities within households; and ritual action. We therefore created three sections in the volume along these lines: Architecture as Archive of Social Space; The Active Household; and Ritual Space at Home.

Chapters in the first section, 'Architecture as Archive of Social Space,' profile houses as *records* of the lives of inhabitants, changing and adapting *with* residents; many offer a background focus on how human behavior is shaped by the walls within one's own home. All of the chapters in this section are united in their quest to answer two questions: 'what is the nature of a house and household' and 'who lived in these household spaces?' Picardo (chapter 2) embraces both of these questions in his investigation of ancient Egyptian structures identified as 'houses.' Using theoretical frameworks based on, among others, Lévi-Strauss' conception of the 'social house' (1987), Picardo offers tools researchers may use to identify the social identity of residents who constituted ancient Egyptian households. Vincent (chapter 3) and Battini (chapter 6) also directly address social identity in their studies. Vincent focuses on both the physical structure of Iron I period (transitional Late Bronze to Iron Age) houses at her site in Jordan, as well as the material culture contained within the structures. These offer clues to a neighborhood social identity featuring cooperation in both social and economic realms. Vincent's study also seeks to identify who may have used particular spaces within the households, effectively delineating areas perhaps dedicated to women's work. Battini (chapter 6) traces an image of neo-Babylonian society starting from Ur's archaeological remains. Rejecting previous social studies too closely tied to fashionable theories that forced an understanding of Mesopotamian society, she uses theoretical frameworks based on contemporary sociologists and the inductive method—the only way not to preconceive readings of the ancient remains. She demonstrates that at this time Ur had houses of particularly great size and a certain wealth, probably linked to the nearby religious acropolis. The study of the house plots reveals their tormented history of alternating economic fortunes which gradually constituted them.

The other three chapters in this section, one by Zimansky (chapter 4), one by Matney *et al.* (chapter

5) and one by Damm are concerned with 'what is a house' in the context of the state systems in which residents at their sites resided. Zimansky asks whether the Urartian state dictated guidelines as to the form of domestic structures at the Ayanis Urartian center. He determines that the houses thus far exposed at this site demonstrate individuality rather than conformity, suggesting that residents, whether families, soldiers, or other segments of the society, may have had much freer reign to design the structure of their homes than might have been surmised in a powerful center such as Ayanis. In the same vein, Matney *et al.* asks whether structures at the Neo-Assyrian settlement of Ziyaret Tepe were indeed houses, and if so, who was inhabiting them. Their careful review of textual data and material culture leads them to the conclusion that these structures may have been inhabited by a very specific segment of the population, namely the soldiers who were expected to protect the city. Though the chapters in this section treat houses and households in places ranging from Egypt, to Mesopotamia, and as far north as eastern Anatolia, the connection between structure and identity is clearly defined throughout the section. Damm (chapter 7) explores food practices in a multiethnic community of southern Levant at the Late Bronze Age as proof of ethnic identity. The community of practices, created by repeated action and socialized learning inherent to the formation of the habitus, allows him to examine cultural contact in colonial and imperial situations, like Beth-Shean under Egyptian domination. Damm demonstrates that higher levels of Egyptian-style ceramics do not correlate with an increase in Egyptian practices: foodstuffs consumed and their mode of preparation are still Levantine.

The middle section, 'The Active Household,' focuses on the evidence for how residents carried out household activities including work and food preparation. Chapters include the 'heart of household archaeology' in their application of activity area research, but also drill down to the social significance of *what* residents were doing or eating, and *where* such actions were taking place. The chapters in this section present two main themes: the definition and identification, including both of what and where, of daily activities in a domestic setting, and secondly, investigation of the intersection of extra-domestic work and the home setting. Three chapters, Greenfield (chapter 9), Swerida (chapter 10), and Shafer-Elliott *et al.* (chapter 12) zero in on the detritus of daily domestic life.

Greenfield *et al.* focus their attention on the Early Bronze period (c. 3700–2000 BC, and particularly the Early Bronze III) at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath in the Levant. Their decade of research allows them to document what residents did in their small urban homes, and where they did it. They identify indoor versus outdoor chores,

and even non-work activities such as gaming and body decoration, providing a glimpse into the waking hours of residents who lived over four millennia ago. At Tell Halif in the Shephelah, Shafer-Elliott *et al.* conduct a careful analysis of artifactual and ecofactual remains in the Iron Age II houses at this site. The site is located between Judah and Philistia, the Iron II period is one during which the Assyrian empire exerted considerable pressure (in the form of tribute) on the Kingdom of Judah. Shafer-Elliott *et al.* are able to determine the intra-household cooperation at Tell Halif allowed residents to remain largely free of both the enmity between Philistia and Judah as well as the economic impact levied on Judah by the Assyrians; their research yields critical data on daily life at settlements in the 'hinterlands' in this dynamic period. Swerida undertake close analysis of the comparatively meagre remains at the Early Bronze Age (c. 2700–2000 BC) Omani site of Bat. The site rests on an important exchange network and the Early Bronze Age in this region was one of technological development, particularly that of metallurgy. Swerida is able to trace how residents negotiated the changing need for domestic and work space (the latter dedicated in part to metallurgical endeavors) over the course of seven centuries of occupation.

The three other chapters focus on 'work life' in Egypt, the Levant, and Anatolia. Boozer (chapter 13) takes on the study of workshops/areas within Romano-Egyptian homes (1st–4th centuries AD). Her study reveals a variety of important work-life circumstances. For instance, rather than 'workshop clusters' of similar activities in neighborhoods or sectors of settlements, in Romano-Egyptian settlements residents carried out vocations where they lived, so that a neighborhood might have a variety of craftworkers living side-by-side. Boozer also provides a number of other insights into how work and life played out across the Romano-Egyptian landscape of two millennia ago. Steiner (chapter 11) focuses on the Iron Age II houses of Jerusalem, most of which were excavated decades ago. She explores the identification of some of these houses that had been identified as existing in a 'Royal Quarter'; she effectively demonstrates that rather than 'royal,' these houses instead belonged to traders and artisans. Residents dedicated portions of these somewhat larger houses to their trade, and while they were far from the poorest residents of the city, they also did not live the luxurious lives of the elites. Steiner reveals the daily lives of middle class Iron Age entrepreneurs in ancient Jerusalem. Selover *et al.* (chapter 8) survey the 'work-life balance' during a millennium of occupation (c. 3800–2800 BC) at Çadır Höyük in central Turkey. Over the course of this period they trace both the location and the level of production activities at the site. Residents preferred to carry out their activities in open areas where social interaction was possible; in

addition, analysis details how the level of production rose when trade opportunities increased and declines when exchange networks retracted. Selover *et al.* are also able to demonstrate the Çadır residents' adherence to a consistency of architecturally-defined spaces over an occupation spanning 1000 years.

The final section, 'Ritual Space at Home,' features studies on the house as ritual space. The fact that spaces within households were loci of religious ritual should come at no surprise, and yet the more general field of household religion is still relatively young in Near Eastern studies. Happily, material culture and materialized household religion is adding important data and theory to this subfield of household archaeology, as the studies in this section demonstrate. This research fills important gaps in our knowledge of the archaeology of religion in various regions and time periods across southwest Asia, as did the studies in the Steadman and Brody (2018) *Near Eastern Archaeology* themed issue on the archaeology of household religion; whereas previous textual approaches have both tremendous gaps in representation and biases towards elite or divine households and contexts.

The three chapters in the final section, Hopwood (chapter 14), Mas (chapter 15), and Heffron (chapter 16) all focus their attention on the house as a locus of ritual and symbolism. Hopwood investigates the ritual significance of both structure and contents at the site of Kenan Tepe in southeastern Turkey. She focuses on the circumstance of the mid-5th millennium BC 'Burnt House' at the site, and focuses on the evidence for an intentional 'killing' of the house. In particular, she notes the absence of heavy ground stone tools, typically present in every Kenan Tepe house of the era. She lays out a detailed argument for both the ritual killing of the house and the need to preserve life-giving tools created and used by generations of a home's residence. Heffron focuses on the ritual activities that took place within Middle Bronze Age homes at the central Anatolian site of Kültepe/Kaneš. She reviews the material culture, including sub-floor burials, as well as key textual evidence from the time, to layout a detailed description of the mainly ancestor/family based ritual activities within these homes, carried out in an 'as needed' fashion. In a similar vein, Mas explores the presence of domestic altars in Bronze Age Mesopotamian houses, also focused on devotion to family and ancestor. Her analysis identifies activities such as feasting, actions meant to bring about magical protection, and veneration of the ancestors. She makes a powerful case for Bronze Age Mesopotamian houses being viewed as 'symbolically charged spaces.'

The reconstructions presented here in the various chapters are certainly fragmented and limited. Limited

because the volume does not claim to be exhaustive, and fragmented because the geographic areas and the periods dealt with are far-ranging. But precisely, this fragmentation allows for a comparative study whose interest is no longer doubted. And at the end of the volume, the house appears as a complex, structural, familial, working, and symbolic entity: multiple and singular at the same time, indispensable for creating and maintaining social ties, the house already appears in the past as a structuring pillar of society, the household, and the family. It is no coincidence that it has been humankind's companion for millennia.

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