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‘Squatting’ in the Iron Age: an Example of Third Space in Archaeology

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In this paper, I briefly elaborate on the differences between two notions of third space, one rooted in postcolonial theory, the other in Marxist geography. Marxist geography is concerned with the production of antagonistic spatialities. I use this idea to analyze various notions of space of and in the Iranian Iron Age polity of the Medes. The main issue is the interpretation of “squatting” habitations at the two sites of Tepe Nush-i Jan and Godin Tepe. I argue that the flimsy walls set into the massive architecture of earlier levels are a sign of tensions over conflictual spatialities.

Third space; Marxist geography; Median empire; spatiality; squatting; Iron Age; Iran

I Introduction

‘Third Space’ is a notion that appears in literary studies, social and cultural sciences, and geography. The origin of the term can be traced to two intellectuals who came up with the notion at roughly the same time but independently from each other and with divergent understandings, the postcolonial literary theorist Homi Bhabha and the Marxist sociologist-philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Despite the differences between the two authors, their writings about third space have one element in common: a refusal to categorize the real world into clear-cut analytical categories. For many of us, this refusal strikes at the core of our academic practices. If a theory asserts that a phenomenon is so complex that it defies explicitly outlined methods and categories, is that not a rejection of the scientific process itself? Why even bother to contemplate such statements when they cannot be applied to real world phenomena in a way that can be clearly communicated to others and retraced step-by-step?

However, let us consider this stance in more detail: What if human life and its impact on the earth at both small and large scales is so complex that methodological reductionism amounts to falsification? In the face of present-day large-scale problems, it is important to examine critiques of the process of reading simple patterns into complex assemblages with a critical eye. Third-space theories are part of such a critique.

Before I turn to a focus on Henri Lefebvre’s work and that of his best known follower, the American geographer Edward Soja, I would like to briefly set their conceptualizations apart from Homi Bhabha’s ideas about third space. Bhabha uses the same vocabulary to point to something quite different. His creative and sometimes disputed work¹ has had a wide impact in the humanities and social sciences.

I thank Kerstin Hofmann for many inspiring discussions on topics ranging from space to identity to knowledge. I equally thank Vera Egbers, Susan Pollock, Stefan Schreiber and many other students and colleagues for discussions and critique, as well as the research cluster Topoi for opportunities to think in directions beyond traditional topics. This paper was originally written in the fall of 2015 while I was a fellow at the National Humanities Center at Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

1 E. g. Chandra 2012.

2 Homi Bhabha's Notion of Third Space

When Homi Bhabha delivered the Hegel Lecture at the Freie Universität in 2010, he used the opportunity to elaborate on his postcolonial notion of a third space which he developed as a counter-project to Hegelian dialectics, the well-known relation of negation and its *Aufhebung* or sublation.² For Bhabha, third space is a relational position of speech. He illustrates this most clearly with the example of colonial 19th century Indian villagers whom missionaries wanted to convert to Christianity. In response, they said they could not convert as long as the word of that god came out of the mouth of meat eaters, because words of a god cannot be transmitted by meat eaters. “[Y]our priests are a nonvegetarian class”, they insisted.³ So, instead of an opposition to the missionizing effort, an antagonism familiar to dialectical thinking, Bhabha analyzes the encounter by claiming that the villagers took the position of an *Abseits* or “beyond” that does not lend itself to dialectical *Aufhebung*.⁴ Third space, this position of an *Abseits*, is not a space between two opposites, or the dialectical move to a higher level of abstraction, but a space offside. Perhaps more importantly, it is an enunciatory location. Such a deflected, *entstellte* (‘ex-posed’) position remains ambiguous, or, as Bhabha put it, hybrid and undefinable. These kinds of positionalities are unusual, if not threatening to those whose business is classification and categorization, that is, in the first instance bureaucrats, but also researchers, the judicial apparatus and others who depend on the dissolution and destruction of ambiguities as a means to sustain the powers that be. Bhabha, however, theorizes ambiguation or the production of ambiguities as a human practice. I have shown elsewhere that archaeological evidence for such ambiguation practices is possible to identify.⁵ However, postcolonial and geographical notions of third space do not necessarily co-occur in one and the same historical case.

3 Third Space in the Writings of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja

I turn my attention now to a different “third space” in philosopher-geographer Henri Lefebvre’s theory. This alternative notion of third space is not concerned with a metaphorical space of enunciation but with the spaces of experience, projection and practices. It has its roots in a French Marxist and therefore materialist intellectual tradition. Henri Lefebvre, its main proponent, was a member of the French Communist Party even before the Nazi occupation of France. The PCF expelled him because of his unorthodox views, but if anyone today was writing in Lefebvre’s style, he or she would probably be labeled as an unacceptably dogmatic Marxist. How then did he inspire a field that is sometimes called “postmodern geography”? As the title of his main book on space, *La production de l’espace*, makes clear, Lefebvre asserts that space is not a given, but a product.⁶ He talks about historically specific *spatialités* but maintains that “l’espace n’est pas produit comme un kilogramme de sucre ou un mètre de toile”.⁷ Space is only partly material, as it is partly based on discourse and abstract notions and always involves relationships of power. Furthermore, Lefebvre criticizes the proliferation of different kinds of spaces for which there are all manner of specialists who analyze them unidimensionally as if they

2 Hegel 1979, 113–115.

3 Homi Bhabha, in an interview with W.T. Mitchell. URL: <https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/interview.html> (visited on 30/06/2019).

4 Bhabha 2004, 10; see also Bhabha 1985.

5 Bernbeck 2017.

6 Lefebvre 2000.

7 Lefebvre 2000, 102.

could be easily separated, for example, ecological, geographic, demographic, economic or political spaces. He maintains that this multiplicity is in need of an overarching theory that deals with the production of space and that does not favor any one of these artificially separated spaces. For example, central place theory does not suffice to address geographically situated political change, as it is driven by purely economic reasoning,⁸ nor are the distribution maps so typical for approaches in prehistory adequate since they are mainly based on regional, type-specific spreads of objects.⁹ One of Lefebvre’s main points is that space is just as much a product of imagination, myth, religion and literature as of daily practices, monuments and urban planning. He asserts that the production of space is a multifaceted process that is driven by differing, often antagonistic interests. Lefebvre defines three main dimensions of space, which he calls a perceived, a conceived, and a lived space.¹⁰ I come back to definitions of them below. Suffice it to say here that they denote different ways of looking at and acting in and through one and the same space. *Perçu*, *conçu* and *vécu*, as these spatial aspects are called in the French original, have been translated into “first”, “second” and “third” spaces. But there is no actual space that is solely a third, second or first space.

3.1 *Espace perçu* or ‘first space’

Perceived space or ‘first space’ in Lefebvre’s discussions is empirical and directly observable. Put simply, it is the material quality of space. It is the commonsensical space of a lifeworld that surrounds us as a presence that is not necessarily laden with explicit meaningfulness. However, this space is not just there, since all space is in a constant process of production. That leads to unforeseen consequences which become part of this perceived space. For example, the construction of irrigation networks leads to all kinds of unintended consequences: weed growth in some places, decreased vegetation in others. To give another example: A city wall, meant to protect a social group from outside dangers, ends up as a boundary between people when longer-term urban growth leads to settling on the wall’s outside, thus producing effects of an exclusion that was not intended at the outset.

3.2 *Espace conçu* or ‘second space’

Conceived or second space denotes the production of spatial representations in the form of verbal discourses, maps, graphs, plans and visualizations. Lefebvre includes here a traditional problem of Marxism: class domination. While this may sound antiquated to us today, we can widen this idea to mean generalized spatial relations of domination. It is evident that dominant groups have the prerogative to conceptualize and design space and to produce representations of it. Second or conceived space is that area where property rights, the power to distribute or partition spaces, the practices of inhibiting availability and the pro- and prescribed actions in sacred spaces are produced and reproduced. Architects, urban planners, clergy, real estate agents and administrators of space wield their power in this realm. In urban spaces, a single individual will have a hard time impinging on the city’s design, unless he or she is close to the centers of power. Albert Speer’s function as the Nazis’ *Generalbauinspektor* for the never realized Nazi capital ‘Germania’ is an extreme example of power relations over secondary space.¹¹ Recent public architecture, from uni-

8 E. g. Christaller 1933; Nakoinz 2013.

9 Eggers 1950; Steuer 2006.

10 Lefebvre 2000, 48–50.

11 Reichardt and Schäche 1998.

versity buildings to city offices with all the bells and whistles of ‘smart,’ i. e. electronic means of tight control, equate to an imposition of such conceived spaces at a smaller, more intricate level, producing in the last instance even more effective domination. Much urban planning and almost all official architecture are part of secondary or conceived space, a planned arrangement that sets the limits for possible future spatially framed interactions between people.

3.3 *Espace vécu* or ‘third space’

Lived or third space is more difficult to grasp. Lefebvre connects this mode of space strongly to the notion of experience, in the sense of *Erleben* (‘lived experience’) rather than long-term, cumulative *Erfahrung* (‘cumulative experience’). Third space is predominantly a matter of quotidian life and its history. It is based on practices (and theories of them) rather than large-scale civilizational narratives. However, small-scale actions and their motivations are of course bound up with larger scale structures, and Lefebvre does not neglect this relation. He concludes that this lived space comprises both second and first space. At the same time, third space conflicts with and subverts those simpler modes of conceived and perceived space.

What matters most is not so much any single one of these spatial modes, but rather the relations between them. This is the point where Lefebvre’s concept becomes tricky, as he calls this a “dialectique de triplicité”.¹² One major tenet in this approach to relational dynamics is the incorporation of antagonisms and contradictions. Standard spatial analyses, with nicely hierarchized criteria, calculable variables, fixed sets of spatial attributes for comparative purposes, or distribution maps, will never be able to capture a production of space that is marred by incommensurable interests of various groups and individuals. One result is, for example, the question of differential ‘mapabilities’ of various spheres of life. Do all phenomena of spatial importance lend themselves in the same way and to the same degree to projection onto a map, a two-dimensional representation of space? This is obviously not the case, if we consider, for example, the ‘dreamtime’ of Australian aborigines¹³ or some of Kafka’s descriptions of spaces.

This integration of the material production of space, its conceptualization, and the creation of space through practices should not be regarded as a process without deeply running conflicts. Lived or third space is what all planners, zoning specialists, architects and administrators dislike. It is the use of their well-designed products, whether material or immaterial, for needs that they have not foreseen. It often includes a strong element of semi-intentional subversiveness, as when you cross the street despite a red light, just because no car is coming. Current means of intentionally creating third spaces have become extremely diverse, especially with the advent of electronic technologies. For example, a few years ago one could download an alternative audio guide for Berlin’s Deutsches Historisches Museum that depicted German colonial history in a starkly different light than the official museum guides do.¹⁴ This created a new experience not only of knowledge, but also of the space of the museum. Official discourse and exhibits on German colonialism sidelined, peripheralized and minimized the views of the colonized, while the alternative guide emphasized these and other elements in the exhibit that were officially unrelated to colonialism. At the time, the official and alternative audio guides produced a differential and contradictory experience of the museum itself as a cognitive landscape –

12 Lefebvre 2000, 49, 374; *Dialectique de triplicité* has turned into “trialectics” in the hands of Edward Soja, a misguided attempt to press the complex relational dimensions of Lefebvre’s thoughts into one reifying concept (Soja 1996, 60–82).

13 James 2015.

14 Lerp and Lewerenz 2015.

until the museum changed its exhibit and took over some of the suggestions by its critics.¹⁵ More antagonistic, larger-scale examples abound, not only in Berlin: gentrification can be analyzed as the breaking open of the contradictions between a conceived space for a domesticated, fully submissive urban landscape and the dreams of different, utopian urbanities that manifest themselves in anti-gentrification attacks and other attempts to create spatialities from below.

4 Third Spaces and the Medes

For archaeology, a Lefebvrian third space is not easy to conceptualize for two reasons. First, in order to wring from an archaeological past any evidence that is even remotely reliable, the discipline has developed an extremely strong penchant for categorizations of material remains. An academic sector the main practices of which still consist of producing typologies or classifications is by necessity fundamentally simplifying, preferring the ideal type over the real world. Second, how should we approach a "lived space" when all life has disappeared from the ruins we study?¹⁶ Neither of these issues is a major problem for sociologists or geographers for whom the abyss of temporal difference is of no concern.

To illustrate a potential application I turn to an example from ancient Western Asia, the Median 'empire'. I will analyze this polity in two different temporalities. I first approach it as a conceived past space that is conceptualized *in the scholarly present*. This amounts to a trans-chronological production of ordered spaces, mainly of political organization: we do not reconstruct past real spaces, but past conceptualizations of space. This (present) conceptualization of (past) conceptualizations is clearly different from the temporalities of Lefebvre's second space, which is set in a time of expectations about a future. A precondition for all trans-chronological constructions is the academic acquisition of knowledge about a past polity, by necessity a process of present-day symbolic appropriation. Scholarly discussions produce a situation in which a person or group is in metaphorical possession of a better argument than others. This conceived present space can be compared to past practices or third spaces. These second and third spaces are thereby located on different temporal planes. Furthermore, there is a Median-period conceived space, the one that served as a blueprint for massive architectural complexes in the area of modern Hamadan (Iran). Associated with such ancient second spaces is a third, lived space in the past that can also be extracted from excavation data. I will outline below how a specific architectural development, the ephemeral use of formerly monumental structures, lends itself to the empirical exploration of third spaces.

Before I do so, a brief sketch of the hazily known 'empire of the Medes' is in order. Standard wisdom has it that the Median empire lasted from approximately 750 BCE to sometime around 550 BCE, when the last Median ruler Astyages/Ishtumegu was overthrown by the Achaemenid king Kyros II. The origins of Median populations are unclear, and there is also no easily identifiable Median material culture.¹⁷ According to present knowledge, they were one of the Indo-Iranian speaking groups that entered the Iranian highlands sometime in the later second to early first millennium BCE. We know of 'Medes' through external written testimony only. What interests me is how researchers have turned flimsy material and textual sources into a spatially extensive empire. I will go

15 Manuela Bauche, Dörte Lerp, Susann Lewerenz, Marie Muschalek and Kristin Weber, "Kolonialismus im Kasten?" URL: <https://www.kolonialismusimkasten.de/der-guide/> (visited on 07/06/2019).

16 A workshop in Berlin on *Subaltern Spaces* in 2017 tried to grapple with methodological and theoretical problems of third spaces in the realm of archaeology. Its contributions are to be published later in 2019 in the online journal *Forum Kritische Archäologie*.

17 Muscarella 1987.

into some detail to show the tricky nature of academic discourse as a process that produces past *espaces conçus* or secondary spaces.

Assyrian documents give the earliest hints of the Medes' existence, pointing to a geographic region of the western Zagros and parts of the Iranian plateau, and perhaps a decentralized political system. From the Greek side, Herodotus left the most complete account, relying on local oral traditions and tales that described the Median kings Deioces and Astyages as powerful rulers of a unified polity. Herodotus' heavy influence on modern historiography and archaeological reconstructions of Media is undeniable. His description of the capital Ekbatana under Deioces is a colorful example of one of his 'ethnographies':

This fortress is so designed that each circle of walls is higher than the next outer circle by no more than the height of its battlements; to which plan the site itself, on a hill in the plain, contributes somewhat, but chiefly it was accomplished by skill. There are seven circles in all; within the innermost circle are the palace and the treasuries; and the longest wall is about the length of the wall that surrounds the city of Athens. The battlements of the first circle are white, of the second black, of the third circle purple, of the fourth blue, and of the fifth orange: thus the battlements of five circles are painted with colors; and the battlements of the last two circles are coated, the one with silver and the other with gold. Deioces built these walls for himself and around his own quarters, and he ordered the people to dwell outside the wall.¹⁸

Of course, Herodotus' closely similar description of the ziqqurat of Babylon is apparent here, with seven steps, all in different colors as well.¹⁹ His account, plus the fact that the Medes contributed to the downfall of the Assyrian empire in 612 BCE, led to the assumption that the Median empire must have been equal in power to contemporary polities such as Assyria itself, the Neo-Babylonian empire or Urartu. Curiously, the allies of the Medes, the Babylonians, call them in their chronicles *umman-manda*, a topos for unruly, unstoppable, uncivilized enemies.²⁰

As Liverani remarks, the logic of the Greek sources seems to be that since the Achaemenid empire conquered the Medes, they must have been similarly organized and powerful.²¹ This follows a simple *translatio imperii* scheme, a kind of rhetoric that has also infiltrated modern historiography, making of the Medes a spatio-temporal concept that could fill all kinds of chronospatial voids. Edith Porada readily used the Medes to bridge the chronological and spatial gap between the older kingdom of Urartu and the later Achaemenids.²² For Michael Roaf, Media is a convenient *Lückenfüller* between the Assyrian and the Achaemenid empires, though he adds a mélange of different exterior influences such as the Scythians and Mannaeans.²³

Consequences of building past geographies from Greek sources become stunningly clear in the initial mistaken identification of Kerkenes Dag with the Median city of Pteria, mentioned in Herodotus, Book 1.²⁴ Historical geography is a notoriously problematic field but displays particularly exaggerated claims in the case of ancient Media. Maps of Media often still give a sense of regional unity that far surpasses any archaeological or historical evidence (Fig. 1).

18 Herodotus (Godle) 1920, 98.4–99.1.

19 Asheri 2007, 150.

20 Adali 2011, 85, 173–189.

21 Liverani 2003.

22 Porada 1965, 140.

23 Roaf 2003.

24 Herodotus (Godle) 1920, 76–79.



Fig. 1 | Graphic representation of an inflated reach of the Median ‘empire.’

Worse, subsequent art historical research on an ivory panel found at Kerkenes Dag led for a brief time to the supposition that it was exemplary for ‘Median’ art. After the recognition that Kerkenes Dag belongs to the Phrygian and not the Median realm, David Stronach still tried to retain Media’s status as an empire by insisting that Tepe Ozbaki west of Tehran was a Median fortress and that ancient Rhages/Rey was a Median city, despite a glaring lack of evidence other than architectural remains that vaguely resemble Godin Tepe II and Nush-i Jan.²⁵ Olivier Lecomte claimed that even the massive fortress on top of Ulug Depe in the northern foothills of the Kopet Dag in Turkmenistan belongs to the Median empire.

Equally untenable for the construct of the ‘mighty Medes,’ as they are sometimes called in Assyrian sources, are recent archaeological results from Tappeh Hegmataneh, believed to hold the Median capital with its rings of differently colored walls. Excavations by Mohammed Sarraf exposed large sections of a strictly organized part of the ancient capital.²⁶ But the purported Median date of this site has been thoroughly refuted by the late Massoud Azarnoush, who dated it to the Parthian period.²⁷ Some interpretations are still driven by a strong desire to validate extremely doubtful written sources by way of archaeological materials. They do so by labeling buildings and sites ‘Median’ when they can be remotely connected to Herodotus’ views. The Wikipedia map of ancient Media is the public face of this historical concept.²⁸ However, contributions by Helen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Giovanni Lanfranchi but also by other historians, philologists and archaeologists have resulted in a sober reevaluation of at least the archaeological remains.²⁹ Lecomte summarizes this succinctly, albeit with apparent regret: “The scientific

25 Stronach 2003, 240.

26 Sarraf 2003.

27 Azarnoush 2007.

28 Anonyma 2016.

29 Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988; Lanfranchi 2003.

community agreed to deny any ethnic or political existence and all territorial ascendancy to Median power which preceded in Iran the rise to power of the Achaemenids.³⁰

What has been at work here is the production of a past imperial space in the present, for which a small number of shadowy, unreliable sources were used. The continuous flow of blatantly misleading interpretations on a scale far beyond any single location is stunning. There is an underlying reason that has only indirectly to do with the ancient Medes. ‘Media’ as a historical entity is a trans-chronologically conceived space. The imaginary responsible for the conceptualization cannot accept whole historical periods that consist of large swaths of politically unruly and unruled spaces. This particular conceptual, scholarly inability leads to the construction of a specific historico-geographic narrative that serves to reconfirm an ahistorical principle, namely the necessity of state power, by filling periods of relative anarchy with expansive but fictitious political powers. In terms of political philosophy, we are back to Hegelianism, in a realm that relates spatial concepts to desires for security.

5 Empirical Traces of Third Space at Median Sites

From the level of the polity, I now turn to individual sites, a scale where lived, third space is more readily detectable. If there is any geographic reality to a region belonging to the Medes, it is the area around modern Hamadan, ancient Ekbatana, in Western Iran. Several Iron Age sites have been excavated in the vicinity, among them Hasanlu, Baba Jan, Godin Tepe and Nush-i Jan. Here, I will content myself with a few remarks about Godin Tepe Level II and Nush-i Jan, the two sites closest to Ekbatana. Godin Tepe is interpreted by its excavators and publishers as the seat of a local chieftain (*bēl āli*)³¹ who ruled over an unknown number of villages in the vicinity, while Nush-i Jan has been identified as having a primarily religious function.³²

In order to analyze potential antagonisms in the use of space, between the originally intended conception and the ‘abuses’ in the form of third spaces, we have two archaeological methods at our disposal. First, microarchaeology gives important indications for daily practices as opposed to planned functions because it analyzes debris that has been left behind unintentionally.³³ It can then be compared to the presumed intended functions of buildings. A second possibility to investigate third spaces archaeologically consists in the comparison of successive stratigraphic layers at a site and their changing layout. When no hiatus exists between two layers, major changes can be assumed to be the result of underlying tensions over the production of space that manifest themselves in the realization of a new spatiality in a later phase. In the case of both Nush-i Jan and Godin II, the latest Iron Age occupations consist of so-called ‘squatter occupations.’ This phenomenon has also been identified at other major Iron Age sites in ‘Greater Mesopotamia’ such as Nimrud³⁴, Baba Jan³⁵ and Tell Sheikh Hamad/Dur Katlimmu³⁶.

The architecture of the ‘main’ levels at Nush-i Jan and Godin II diverges significantly from the standard Mesopotamian building plans and techniques. Their massive walls were erected with the use of timber; ‘windows’ consist of narrow vertical slits in the walls. More importantly, both show the use of columned halls, similar to older ones at Hasanlu.³⁷ In

30 Lecomte 2011, 231.

31 Gopnik 2011, 295–299.

32 Stronach and Roaf 2007, 67.

33 Rainville 2005.

34 J. Oates and D. Oates 2001, 257–268.

35 Goff 1977.

36 Kreppner and Schmid 2013, 80–111.

37 Dyson 1989.

addition, there is a massive storage building with long hallways at the eastern edge of both Godin and Nush-i Jan (Fig. 2 and 5). It is therefore often assumed that the two sites display typically Median architectural forms. When we look closer, we discover that the main building at Nush-i Jan, a cruciform temple, is a unique feature without parallels at Godin Tepe or elsewhere. Because this tower-like structure was filled intentionally with meters of debris, it is preserved up to the second floor, up to which one can still walk, ascending a small staircase and glancing down into the main room with an altar that had once a fire bowl on its top.³⁸ The burnt material on the altar initially led the excavators to call the building a fire temple.³⁹ An equally small and perhaps high “Old Western Building” as well as a massive storehouse, the “Fort” in the east, belong to this building phase. The fort also contains a staircase suggesting a second floor (Fig. 2).

A later building, squeezed between the central temple and the “Old Western Building”, is a rectangular columned hall with three rows of regularly placed four columns each.⁴⁰ This roof support consisted of wood and was set into a circle of mud brick on a slab of shale.⁴¹ The columned hall has a broad bench at its southern side and niched façades inside and out. An attempt to dig a stairwell down to a cistern was abandoned midway. At Godin Tepe II, the architecture is less varied and more focused on three large columned halls, two rectangular and the largest one square (Fig. 5). All of them have benches running along the walls, likely so that they could serve as assembly halls. The main hall has a dais in the middle of the northern wall. The westernmost hall was the last to be added to the ensemble. At Godin Tepe stairwells do not occur as prominently as at Nush-i Jan.

The last phase of the Median levels at both of these sites consists of so-called “squatter settlements”. The terminology “main phase” and “squatter occupation”⁴² already hierarchizes any interpretation: conceived or second space is evaluated as more important than the performances that make up a large part of lived, third space. The squatter levels massively reconfigure the space, not through a complete redesign but through a radically new *appropriation* of already existing spaces, as I describe below.

5.1 Nush-i-Jan

One important question is the length of the habitation of these levels. For Nush-i Jan, the presumed time of construction is somewhere around 750 BCE or later. Abandonment occurs peacefully around 650 BCE, so that the site’s “main use phase” lasted for no more than 100 years.⁴³ The term “abandonment” is used to describe the end of the main occupation *before* the squatter occupation, as if the site was not really inhabited anymore. And while the excavators want to assign at least 75 years to the squatter occupation,⁴⁴ a duration almost as long as the so-called main occupation, the fact that there were four different architectural phases within the “squatting” levels suggests a quite lengthy period, probably longer than the official use.⁴⁵ Is this then really “post-abandonment,” ephemeral life at Nush-i Jan? Or should we perhaps call the “main phase” rather a “pre-squatter” phase, followed by the temporally more substantial squatting levels?

38 Stronach and Roaf 2007, 82–85 and Pl. 18d.

39 Roaf and Stronach 1973, 135–138.

40 Stronach and Roaf 2007, 53–56 and Fig. 1.9.

41 Stronach and Roaf 2007, 164.

42 Gopnik 2011, 314, notes the inappropriateness of the term “squatter” as “non-rent-paying opportunists” and uses a neutral “Phase II:1” terminology for these levels at Godin Tepe.

43 Curtis 1984, 22; Stronach and Roaf 2007.

44 See also Curtis 1984, 22.

45 See also Muscarella 1985, 729, and Moorey 1986, 801.

The squatter occupation at Nush-i Jan is restricted to the columned hall and a few adjacent areas in the east.⁴⁶ The space in the columned hall was reconfigured while its roof was still intact. Bricks used to build flimsy partition walls are the same size as those used for the monumental main buildings. Thus, there cannot have been much of a temporal break.⁴⁷ cursory descriptions of the pottery also suggest that the vessels from the pre-squatter and the squatter levels were similar.⁴⁸ So far, only one plan of the last phase of the squatting levels is available (Fig. 3).

During that time, the main hall contains five relatively regularly arranged square rooms of ca. 4 x 4 m along the southern wall, with some similarly sized spaces in front of them. Parallel to the northern wall, there is a walkway through the hall in the form of a path between the thin-walled buildings. This walkway takes its orientation from the former eastern and western entries to the hall. At the main entry in the northeast, a large courtyard-like area was left vacant, while most other spaces are cluttered with benches, containers of various kinds, ovens and pedestals of brick. When we compare the original arrangement to this one (Fig. 2; see also Fig 3), several contrasts between the conceived space and its later use become clear:

- the so-called squatters had a sharply different interest in the massive, tall structures than the representative function they originally had;
- the squatters' needs for architectural scales and thus for the daily frames of life were radically different, much smaller than those of the former users of the site;
- they imposed on the hall a much more complex functionality with ovens, spaces to pursue crafts, living and cooking areas. Presumably, the hall had originally one main function – likely representation – whereas it became a place of many different installations, a multifunctional spatiality, in its later phases.

Unfortunately, the pottery from the site remains largely unpublished, so that more precise insights into the multiplicity of uses is only possible on the basis of the published small finds.

For square H11, the “early squatter level”, a space at the main hall’s southern edge, Curtis lists “more than 100 clay loomweights and nearly 20 spindle whorls, plus more than 20 bone spatulae that I have identified as ‘beaters-in’”⁴⁹ – these all indicate the presence of weaving in what was perhaps a specialized peasant household. A focus on textiles not just for exchange by the squatting groups is evident from the large number of fibulae. Contrary to what one might expect, more than three quarters of the 17 fibulae come from squatting levels, indicating a heightened interest in the external markers of *social personae* at a time when conspicuous displays by an elite were less likely than during the main occupation.

5.2 Godin Tepe

I now turn to the site of Godin Tepe, where the squatter settlement of Level II:1 displays some remarkable parallels to Nush-i Jan’s late Iron Age remains. At Godin Tepe, as at Nush-i Jan, one major space of the monumental Iron Age architecture was re-used after an original occupation. Again, a columned hall (Hall 6, see Fig. 5) was the location preferred by the “squatters”, plus parts of the southern entry (spaces 44 to 46⁵⁰, comp.

46 Stronach and Roaf 2007, Fig. 11.7.

47 Stronach and Roaf 2007, 178.

48 Stronach, Roaf, et al. 1978, 9.

49 Curtis 1984, 23, 39.

50 Gopnik 2011, Fig. 7.7.

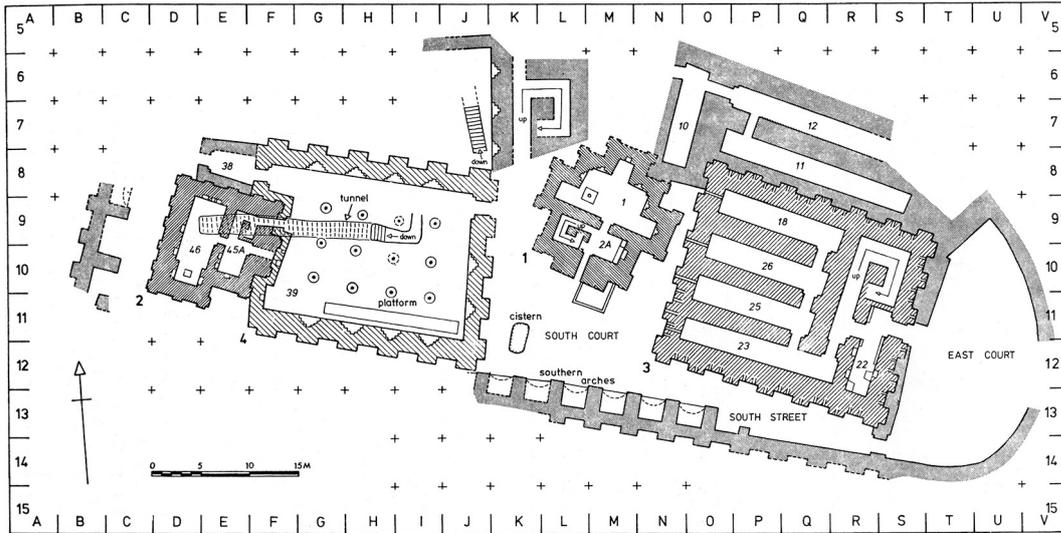


Fig. 2 | Nush-i Jan, plan of the original architecture of the Median level.



Fig. 3 | Nush-i Jan, plan of latest "squatter occupation" in the columned hall.

Fig. 4 and 5). Contrary to the situation at Nush-i Jan, however, the roof of this space had already collapsed, indicating a longer lapse of time before resettlement of the site. In terms of chronology, the impression of 'main' and 'post-abandonment' or 'squatter' use phases again parallels Nush-i Jan. Level II:2 at Godin, the original massive complex with several columned halls and a storage building, likely did not exist for a longer period than level II:1, the time when one hall had been converted to the needs of a village population that lived in the fortress-like ruins.⁵¹ Again, scalar needs were vastly different from those of first-phase occupants (Fig. 4).

51 Gopnik 2011, 343–345.

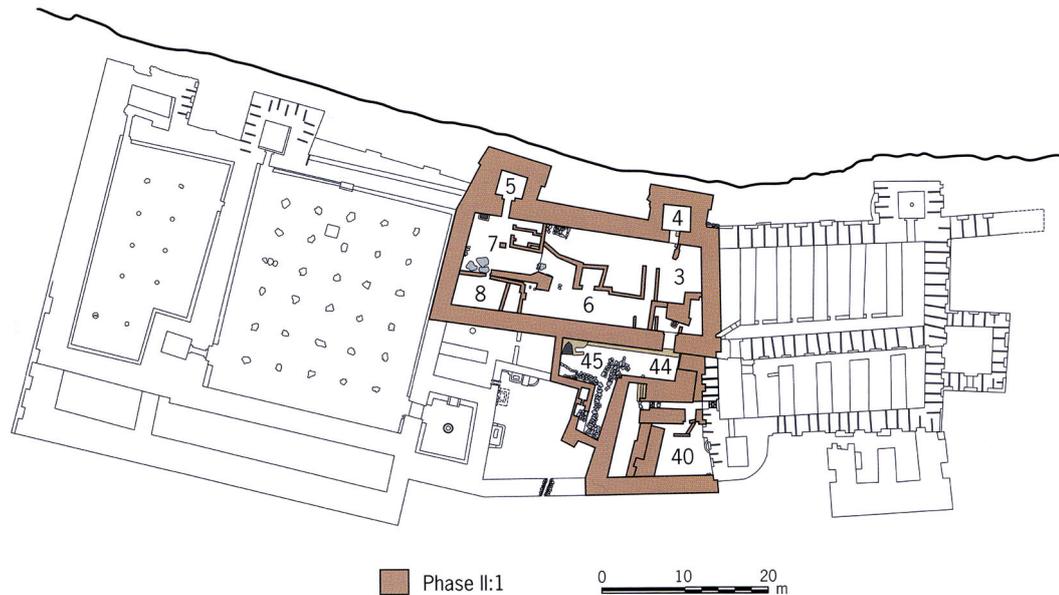


Fig. 4 | Plan of Godin Tepe II:1 (post-abandonment phase).

The late buildings are less regular than at Nush-i Jan, and excavations were not able to trace the walls in their entirety.⁵² The rectangular columned hall (Hall 6; Fig. 5) was divided into four separate spaces, with the entry staying the same as in the earlier period. While spaces 3 and 8 are similar in size to the subdivisions identified in the columned hall at Nush-i Jan, spaces 6 and 7 are larger. Two adjacent watchtowers 4 and 5 were likely part of the late inhabitants' use of this space.⁵³ The entryway continued to be used and contained a large hearth, but the kitchen installations in the southwestern part of the entry complex were abandoned (comp. Fig. 4 and 5).

Pottery analysis shows a clear break between the earlier assemblage of the main level and the later Level II:1 vessels. The former was dominated by small individual serving vessels, whereas the latter was based on large, collectively used bowls.⁵⁴ In addition, the proportion of cooking pots and jars was greater in the later level, while the amount of fine wares decreased.⁵⁵ The so-called squatters do not seem to have been any more mobile than the original occupants. It is therefore fair to assume that they did not come from far away. To the contrary, grinding stones, spindle whorls, pestles and other objects typical of a farming village occur in the "squatting" stratum of Level II.1, again in close parallel to the situation at Nush-i Jan.⁵⁶ The earlier level II:2 did not contain large numbers of objects suited for craft production; a sharp decrease in the percentage of sheep/goat and an increase in cattle also suggests substantially different lifestyles among the new inhabitants.⁵⁷ Thus, archaeological analysis shows in some detail that changes in space went hand in hand with changing practices in other spheres of life. I would not necessarily assume that this is an indication for 'foreign' or entirely different occupants. It remains to be seen how widespread the Level II:1 pottery is in Godin's surroundings, and whether it is potentially indicative of people who may even have been present as a subaltern group at the site or close by already when it was a large manor.

52 Gopnik 2011, 314.

53 Gopnik 2011, 314, Fig. 7.18.

54 Gopnik 2011, 332, Fig. 7.37.

55 Gopnik 2011, 327–333.

56 Gopnik 2011, 322.

57 Gopnik 2011, 324–325.

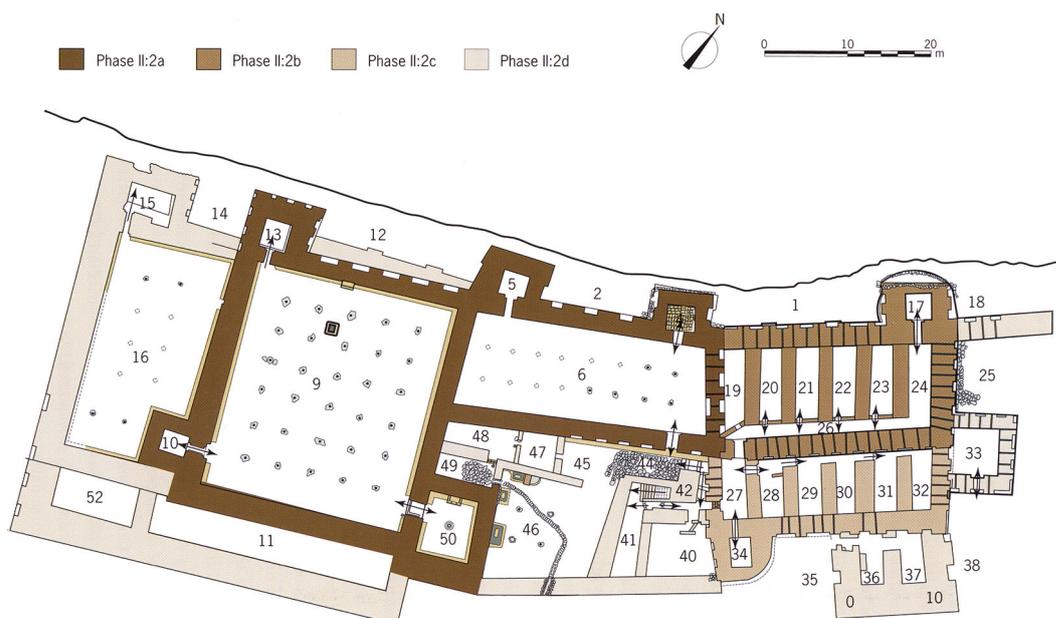


Fig. 5 | Plan of Godin Tepe II:2 (main occupation level from Median times).

In both cases of Nush-i Jan and Godin Tepe II, instead of assuming that squatting is a simple outcome of historically unexplainable, abrupt but peaceful change, I suggest that we see in the “squatting” levels the dissolution of a *pre-existing tension through the production of new and different spatialities*. They are the result of a previous historical configuration where the erection of monumental spaces led to a high level of antagonism over the production of space. For reasons unknown to us, the formerly subordinate groups, who shaped at the time of the main occupation an archaeologically imperceptible third space, were able to impose their own spatialities on a location that neglected the original designers’ insatiable appetite for spaces of representation.

If we follow the indications of the preliminary notes on the pottery at Nush-i Jan and the publication of its architecture, tensions at that site between a second or conceived space of the original planners or builders and a third or lived space of the late users of the abandoned structures were less pronounced than at Godin Tepe.

6 Conclusion

So far, I have discussed archaeologically manifest tensions over the production of spatialities in a trans-chronological dimension and as a matter of a clash of spatialities in the past. My main point is that the kind of analysis I propose reveals tensions between different social groups in the past that normally remain hidden. Social ruptures and stress can stay invisible for a long time. Such situations do not need to result in open conflict, resistance or other kinds of materialized struggle. Rather, the close analysis of stratigraphic sequences, of abandonment and post-abandonment layers can reveal a solution to previous antagonistic constellations. In that respect, the “squatter settlements” do not count as third spaces or *espaces vécus* in Lefebvre’s sense as they were dominant lifeways when established. However, it is reasonable to assume that they had a local past, that they existed parallel to the elite worlds established in previous times of the construction and original use of monumental buildings at places such as Nush-i Jan or Godin Tepe. My conclusion about these two cases is that third spaces may not be materially manifest at all, but can be inferred from particular types of sequences of the archaeological record.

My interpretation also ends with an urgent call to take seriously so-called abandonment levels, squatter occupations and similar layers in excavations. Their historical interest goes beyond an interpretation of the empirical evidence at the time of their use. They are a symptom of a preceding historical repression we need to learn to read.

7 Addendum

Archaeological second and third spaces can also come into conflict in an entirely present horizon. A case in point is modern-day central Syria and the site of Palmyra. Like a number of other Western Asian archaeological sites, including Petra or Hamadan, Palmyra continued to be the location of rural habitations up until the recent past. However, since the Second World War, archaeology, tourism business and administrations have produced a new conceived space that is extremely adverse toward anything like a lived space, Lefebvre's *espace vécu*. Instead, ancient sites are supposed to become places for visual, camera-ready consumption, spaces of 'uncluttered' monuments specifically set up for tourism. Economically, such cleansed, sterile places are extremely lucrative for hotels, restaurants and other tourist amenities. Competition over acquiring the status of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is the consequence. To be successful, applications often mean the eradication of all modern daily life from an ancient site to produce an entity that conforms to an imposed tourist aesthetic.

In Syria, this fundamental and, as Lefebvre would claim, impossible division between a third and a second space played out, for instance, in governmental plans that deported populations living on the ancient site of Qatna to make place for excavations as well as for tourism. A similar process happened in Palmyra. Expropriation of the houses in the middle of Palmyra's ruins and segregation of the local people from the archaeological remains led to the creation of the new city of Tadmor, a space easily controllable by the Syrian government, while neighboring Palmyra became a city of the dead. The gaze on this dead city was sold to global tourists. Up to the last years, UNESCO's World Heritage commission insisted that the Syrian government not only prevent housing on the site, but also that it create an empty buffer zone between archaeological and lived space. To cite from a recent UNESCO report:

There is an on-going need for a conservation and restoration plan [...] that will allow for coordinated management, clear priorities and a cultural tourism strategy and addresses [sic] the issues of expansion of the nearby town.⁵⁸

This amounts to a process of eradication of any traces of third space. Only passing viewers are desired, doing nothing but gazing at a social emptiness or at the ballerinas in the Roman theater at ancient Palmyra. Not without consequences. The "Islamic State" occupied Palmyra at the end of May 2015. The destruction of monuments and the ruthless murder of Khaled al-Asaad, former head of the local Antiquities Department, are well known and deplorable. But the managing of a sharp split between lived and dead spaces for a visually consumable representation, a second space *par excellence*, had further consequences. In July 2015, the "Islamic State" used the restored Roman period theatre to stage a dramatically orchestrated mass killing: 25 soldiers clad in greenish combat fatigue were forced to kneel in a row at the front of the stage, hands bound behind their backs. Standing behind each of them was a young boy, in somewhat lighter but similar uniform, with a revolver in the hand ready to pull the trigger. Archaeology's approach of considering daily life to be a pollution of past spatialities creates the preconditions for such abhorrent practices that abuse the past as a stage for crimes against humanity. We need to urgently rethink how

58 UNESCO 2014.

we conceptualize and practice the production of archaeological spaces. The concert on May 5th, 2016 by the St. Petersburg Mariinsky Theater orchestra under conductor Valery Gergiev after the re-occupation of Palmyra-Tadmor by the Syrian dictator Assad's forces was certainly a step in the wrong direction.⁵⁹

Illustration credits

1 From Wikimedia https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Median_Empire-en.svg (Szajci/WillemBK); 30 April 2013, 17:13:46. 2 Stronach and Roaf 2007, Fig. 1.9. 3 Stronach and Roaf 2007, Fig. 9.1, slightly modified. 4 Gopnik 2011, Fig. 7.18. 5 Gopnik 2011, Fig. 7.7.

59 See also Meskell 2018, 176–184.

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