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Formation and Transformation Dynamics of Ancient Settlements in the Miankouh Region, Pol-e Dokhtar County, Lorestan

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Abstract

Pol-e Dokhtar County is located in the south of Lorestan Province and along the northern borders of Khuzestan. The present study presents the results of an archaeological survey conducted in the eastern and western Miankouh districts of this county. These two rural districts, covering an area of approximately 1,000 km², comprise the eastern sector of Pol-e Dokhtar. The study area, with the exception of the two small plains of Vashyan in the northeastern vicinity of Pol-e Dokhtar town and Dadabad along the northern boundary of the county with Khorramabad, lacks extensive fertile plains and is predominantly mountainous, characterized by narrow valleys and difficult mountain passes. Nevertheless, this area has consistently attracted human occupation across different cultural periods due to its strategic location along the communication route linking the Khuzestan Plain with the Central Zagros and the Iranian Central Plateau. Analysis of the survey data indicates the presence of cultural materials representing several archaeological periods. At the conclusion of the survey, 178 archaeological sites were documented, spanning prehistoric, historical, and Islamic periods. Of these, 88 sites date to the prehistoric period, 75 to the historical period, and 30 to the Islamic period. One of the most significant findings of this research is the identification of more than 50 settlement sites attributable to various phases of Paleolithic, underscoring the sustained and intensive occupation of the Miankouh region during these periods. Furthermore, the documentation of nearly 20 defensive-administrative architectural structures dating to the historical and Islamic eras, along with the construction of several caravanserais along this route during the Safavid period, reflects the strategic and administrative importance of the region in later Islamic centuries. Among the other noteworthy discoveries is Kogan Cave, which, based on the available archaeological evidence, has been dated to the middle Islamic centuries and appears to have been functionally associated with the fortress located above it. Ultimately, the cultural richness of the region, coupled with its considerable environmental potential, appears to reflect its pivotal role as one of the shortest and most strategic communication corridors between the Khuzestan Plain, the Khorramabad Valley, and the broader region of Lorestan.

Keywords: Lorestan, Pol-e Dokhtar County, Archaeological Survey, Eastern Miankouh, Western Miankouh.

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Introduction

Archaeological surveys constitute the initial but fundamental stage of archaeological research, providing the primary data necessary for reconstructing patterns of past human settlement within a given region. The results derived from such surveys, in addition to illuminating various aspects of ancient lifeways and cultural sequences, establish the empirical foundation for subsequent analytical studies aimed at reconstructing human activities across different chronological periods. The more systematic and comprehensive these surveys are, the more refined and nuanced our understanding of regional settlement dynamics and socio-cultural developments becomes. Reliance on systematically collected survey data enhances the reliability of interpretations and enables analyses grounded in material evidence. Archaeological research in Pol-e Dokhtar has a relatively long history. Beyond the accounts of early travelers such as Rawlinson, Edmonds, and De Bode, who passed through the region, the area was subjected to sporadic archaeological investigations prior to the Islamic Revolution, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Notably, the expeditions led by Hole (1979) and Goff (1971) conducted surveys that underscored the strategic importance of the region in terms of communication networks and the study of nomadic societies. In the post-revolution period, additional surveys were undertaken in the county. A Paleolithic survey directed by Kourosh Roustaei and colleagues examined three areas in Lorestan Province, Khorramabad Valley, Kouhdasht County, and Pol-e Dokhtar, and reported evidence of Stone Age human occupation north of Pol-e Dokhtar town (Roustaei et al., 2000).

Furthermore, a survey of the rock shelters of the county was conducted under the direction of Babak Moradi (Moradi, 2006). However, in a more systematic framework aimed at documenting and registering archaeological sites in Pol-e Dokhtar County, two seasons of survey were carried out in 2005 and 2006. The first, under the supervision of Ali Akbar Vahdati, focused on the districts of Jelogir and Jaydar (Vahdati, 2005), while the second, directed by Mohammad Taghi Ataei, concentrated on the districts of Malawi and Afrineh (Ataei, 2006). These investigations resulted in the identification and registration of more than one hundred archaeological sites. In recent years, archaeological activities in the county have also included projects aimed at defining site boundaries and formally registering cultural heritage monuments. Among the most significant of these is the delimitation of the Neolithic site of Kalek Asadmorad, where evidence of settlement dating to the second half of the ninth millennium

BC was identified (Moradi et al., 2016). Pol-e Dokhtar County is situated in southern Lorestan along a major corridor connecting the Susiana Plain with the Lorestan Highlands and the Iranian Central Plateau. One of these long-standing communication routes corresponds to the present-day Khorramabad–Pol-e Zal highway. Given the importance of such intermediary zones in examining cultural interactions between adjacent regions and considering the absence of a comprehensive archaeological assessment of the Miankouh region, particularly for prehistoric periods, the present research was undertaken to address this gap (Bahrami, 2020). The study was conducted in the area known as Miankouh, which, according to current administrative divisions, comprises the two rural districts of East and West Miankouh (Fig. 1).

Survey Method

Due to the mountainous topography and challenging environmental conditions of the region, a fully systematic and comprehensive pedestrian survey was not feasible. Consequently, the research team adopted a multi-scalar approach to enhance field efficiency and coverage. This approach incorporated the analysis of topographic maps, high-resolution aerial imagery from Google Earth, consultation with local guides and knowledgeable residents, and reliance on the prior field experience of team members. Prior to commencing field operations, maps of rural access routes, water resources and springs, as well as the courses of permanent and seasonal streams were carefully examined and analyzed. This preparatory stage enabled the team to enter the field with a well-developed understanding of the region's environmental potential and settlement affordances. Close engagement with local inhabitants, particularly trusted and well-informed individuals, proved instrumental in identifying archaeological locations. While local guidance and cartographic resources were especially effective in locating sites dating to the historical and Islamic periods, the identification of prehistoric occupations, particularly those of the Paleolithic period, relied primarily on the technical expertise and survey experience of the research team. Through the implementation of this integrated strategy, the project ultimately succeeded in identifying and documenting 178 archaeological sites and cultural remains, spanning a chronological range from the Paleolithic period to the Late Islamic centuries.

Physiography

Pol-e Dokhtar County is characterized by a diverse, four-season climate.

Its lowest elevations, situated along the border with Khuzestan province at approximately 500 meters above sea level, fall within the tropical zone. Conversely, the high-altitude mountainous regions to the east, abutting the Hashtad Pahlou massif, are classified as part of the highlands of Lorestan. Excluding two relatively small alluvial plains -Vashyan on the northeastern periphery of Pol-e Dokhtar and Dadabad on the northern border with Khorramabad- the study area lacks expansive fertile lowlands. Instead, it is predominantly rugged and mountainous, defined by difficult-to-pass valleys and high mountain passes. Due to its latitudinal position and proximity to Khuzestan, the Vashyan plain is the lowest topographic basin in Lorestan along the transit corridor from Khorramabad to Khuzestan. The Hashtad Pahlou mountains, situated 26 km southeast of Khorramabad, extend to the Sezar River in the east and border Pol-e Dokhtar and the Dadabad region to the west. As an alpine feature, Hashtad Pahlou retains perennial snow until late summer. This massif is characterized by dense forest cover, diverse fauna, and numerous perennial springs (Amanollahi Baharvand, 1991: 130). The prominent relief and deep valleys in the eastern sector of the study area present significant topographic barriers, which necessitated the formation of a historical road connecting Khuzestan to Khorramabad through the Miankouh region. Miankouh is situated between Hashtad Pahlou to the east and the Kashkan River valley to the west. The region is partitioned into three distinct zones by three parallel mountain ranges: from north to south, the Ghazal, Khargooshan, and Kialo. Khargooshan Mountain serves as the topographic boundary between two rural districts intersected by the Dalich Pass. The orographic influence of these snow-capped peaks facilitates high hydraulic discharge, particularly in eastern Miankouh. This area, with its temperate, well-watered valleys and an altitude of roughly 2,000 m asl, serves as a seasonal habitat for pastoral nomads who winter in northern Khuzestan or the lowland regions south of Pol-e-Dokhtar. To traverse these rugged highlands, nomadic groups utilize natural passes such as Dalich and Hilem.

The Zal River delineates the eastern border of this territory and Pol-e-Dokhtar, eventually confluencing with the Seymareh River to form the Karkheh. Furthermore, the Ghazal (or Chulhoul) River, which drains the northern slopes of Mount Ghazal, flows into the Kashkan after merging with minor tributaries such as the Kogan, Taei, and Ghal-e Nsir near Afrineh. In contrast, the Western Miankouh Rural District exhibits lower elevations and is comparatively poorer in terms of hydrological and botanical resources.

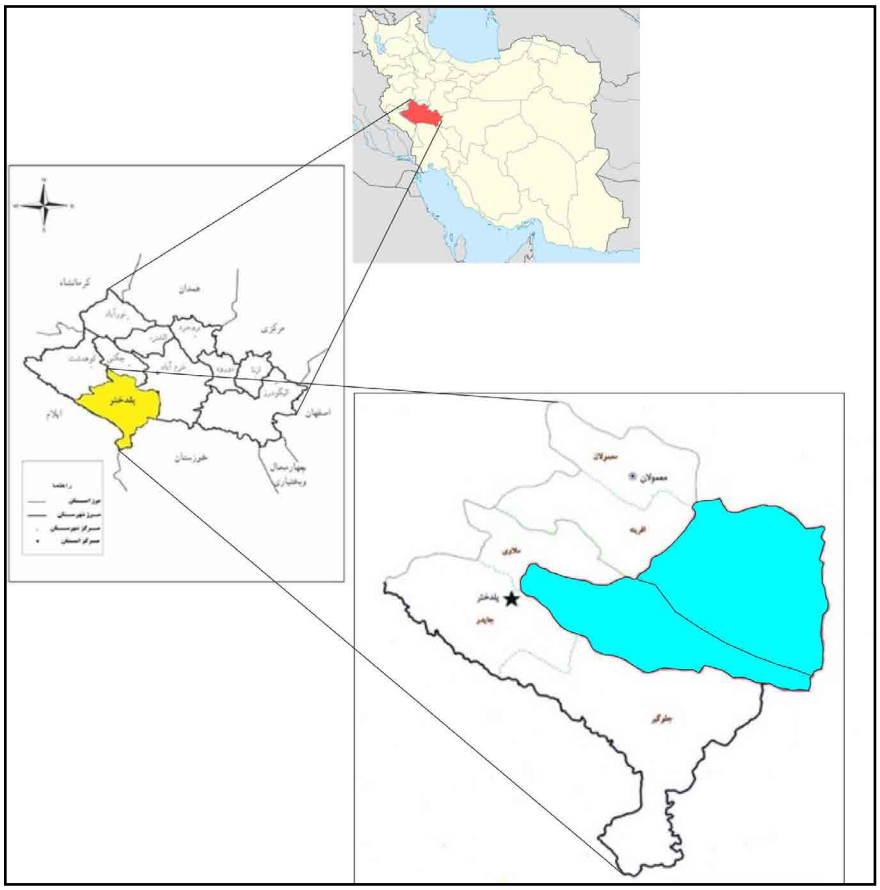


Fig. 1: Location of the eastern and western Miankouh rural districts in the east of Pol-e Dokhtar County (Author, 2023). ▶

The importance of communication routes in the Miankouh region

Given the importance of communication routes in the formation and development of settlements in this region, it is essential to provide a brief discussion of the transportation networks of Lorestan, with particular emphasis on the routes leading to Khuzestan as recorded in historical sources. Lorestan is strategically situated at the intersection of two principal axes of movement, oriented north–south and east–west. These routes can be categorized into two primary branches, as follows:

1- The North–South Route: Estakhri, in Masalek va Mamalek (p. 163), describes the mountainous cities under the heading of the distances between Hamadan and Khuzestan as follows: “From Hamadan to the Rawar River is seven farsakhs; from the Rawar River to Nahavand, nine farsakhs; from Nahavand to Lashtar (Aleshtar), ten farsakhs; from Lashtar to Shaberkhast, present-day Khorramabad, twelve farsakhs; from Shaberkhast to Lur, thirty farsakhs, with no settlements in between; from Lur to Andamesh, present-day Andimeshk, two farsakhs; and from Pol-e Andamesh to Jondishapur, two farsakhs”. This route is described in similar terms by Ibn Hawqal. At

present, much of this route traverses mountainous terrain. From Nahavand it extended toward Gamasyab and from there to Chehel Nabaleghan, the well-known peak of Mount Garin. At this point the road divided into two branches. The western branch led toward Delfan, while the other branch, after passing through the Dare Ash pass, reached the Aleshtar plain and continued from Aleshtar toward Shapurkhast, present-day Khorramabad. The distance between Shapurkhast and "Lur" remains approximately thirty farsakhs along a mountainous route. Historically, the most challenging segments of this major thoroughfare were located between Shapurkhast and Lur, as the road traversed rugged highlands and dense oak forests. During the Safavid period, numerous caravanserais were constructed along this route, several of which have survived. Among those recorded in the Khorramabad region are Goshesh, Chamshak, Qaleh Nasir, Aow Sar, Mishvan, Rezeh, and Charta (Izdpanah, 1997). This corridor corresponds to the same route that passed through the Miankouh region. From Shapurkhast, a secondary route extended toward Boroujerd, Isfahan, and the central plateau. Lestrange, citing Tarikh-e Gozideh, describes this route as follows: "Beyond Boroujerd there is a road that comes from Nahavand and proceeds toward Isfahan, where it divides into two branches. The right branch leads to Shapurkhast, while the left branch, which constitutes the principal route, extends eastward to Karaj Abu Dolaf" (Lestrange, 1996: 217–218).

2- All of these routes mentioned in historical sources of the middle and late Islamic centuries remain in use today, at least in modified form. Rawlinson, who traveled to Iran in the nineteenth century, described in his travelogue the routes between Khuzestan and Khorramabad as follows: "There are three roads from Dezful to Khorramabad. The first road reaches Khorramabad via Jaydar, present-day Pol-e Dokhtar, along the northeastern route, at a distance of ten miles. The second road, eight miles in length, passes through the Zal River and, after crossing the Kialan and Dalich mountains, leads to Khorramabad. The third road runs directly through the mountains, generally heading north, and reduces the distance between the two cities to four miles" (Rawlinson, 1939: 129). These three routes were subsequently described by numerous travelers. The first route was traversed and recorded by Baron de Bode. The second route functioned as the principal corridor during the Safavid and Qajar periods until the construction of the present Khorramabad to Pol-e Dokhtar highway, and it was described in detail by Edmonds, who personally traveled along it (Edmonds, 1983). This route corresponds approximately to the modern Khorramabad–Pol-e

Zal highway. The third route was traveled by Rawlinson himself as well as by Cherikov and appears to represent the oldest communication route in Lorestan (Rawlinson, 1983; Cherikov, 2000).

The foregoing discussion underscores the strategic importance of the Miankouh region in Pol-e Dokhtar County within historical sources. It demonstrates that, throughout both prehistoric and historical periods, this area functioned as a principal communication corridor linking Khuzestan with Lorestan and the Central Zagros region.

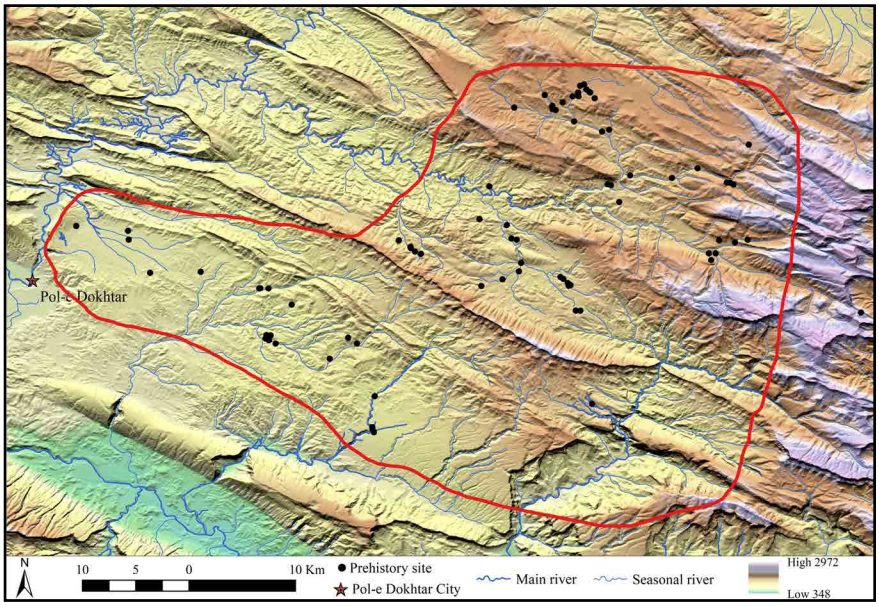
Chronology

During the survey of the Eastern and Western Miankouh rural districts, a total of 178 archaeological sites were identified. Through the analysis of surface materials collected from these locations, evidence for the majority of the region's archaeological cultural periods was confirmed. The documented sites and cultural materials span a chronological range from the Middle Paleolithic period to the Late Islamic centuries. Of the total, 88 sites were attributed to prehistoric periods (Fig. 2), 75 sites to historical periods (Fig. 9), and 30 sites to the Islamic period (Fig. 13). Several of these sites yielded evidence indicating occupation during multiple chronological phases. In the following sections, these data and their respective archaeological periods will be described and analyzed in detail.

Prehistoric Sites

The Central Zagros, with its abundance of Paleolithic sites, has long attracted the attention of Paleolithic archaeologists. One of the most significant results of the present study was the identification of 32 Middle Paleolithic sites. Although some of these lacked diagnostic lithic tools typically associated with this period, their attribution to the Middle Paleolithic was based on the overall assemblage characteristics, the high density of lithic flakes, and the contextual patterning of the sites, taking into account the probable function of each location. The settlements of this period were distributed across both rural districts. Levallois cores, various types of scrapers, and numerous flakes constituted the most important surface finds from these sites (Fig. 3). The evidence of Middle Paleolithic occupation was recorded at a wide range of elevations. For example, the Tir Kouh site in eastern Miankouh is situated at an altitude of 2,235 meters above sea level, whereas the Bon Kareh site in western Miankouh lies at approximately 930 meters. Lithic industries of this period have previously

been documented at major Paleolithic sites in Iran, particularly within the Zagros Mountains and the Khorramabad Valley (Biglari and Shidrang, 2006; Bazgir et al., 2014).



◄ **Fig. 2: Distribution of prehistoric sites within the survey area (Map: H. Ghobadizadeh), (Author, 2023).**

Possible evidence from the Upper Paleolithic period was identified in the Vezmiya region, particularly on the slope in front of Vezmiya Cave. The assemblage includes mixed cores, retouched blades, borers, and scrapers (Fig. 4), suggesting the probable presence of Homo sapiens in this area. Unfortunately, no archaeological evidence was recovered from the interior of the cave. The high density of animal dung resulting from the long-term presence of nomadic herds has most likely covered the cultural deposits and obscured earlier occupational layers. The identification of Middle Paleolithic sites in the vicinity of the cave further strengthens the likelihood that Vezmiya Cave was used during both the Middle and Upper Paleolithic periods. Comparable Upper Paleolithic lithic assemblages have been reported from numerous sites across the Zagros region, most notably Yafteh Cave in the Khorramabad Valley (Hole and Flannery, 1967; Otte et al., 2007). Based on excavation results, Hole divided the lithic industry of this period, which had previously been termed the Bradostian industry by Solecki following his excavation of Layer C at Shanidar Cave (Solecki, 1958), into two phases, an earlier and a later phase. He emphasized the prominence of blades and bladelets, various types of scrapers, borers, and Arjeneh or El Wad points within this industry (Hole, 1970).

From the Epipaleolithic period, 12 sites were identified. Surface surveys at Vezmiya 1, Kogan, and Zour Azma 2 yielded specimens of blade and bladelet cores (Fig. 5: 3, 6, 7), sickle blades (Fig. 5: 1, 4), borers (Fig. 5: 2),

and geometric bladelets. These materials, together with the broader lithic assemblages collected from the sites, strongly support their attribution to the Epi Paleolithic period. The lithic industry of this period in the Zagros region is known as the Zarzian industry, which is well represented at the Warwasi rockshelter (Olszewski, 1993a). In several assemblages attributed to this period, the presence of sickle blades used for harvesting wild cereals has been reported (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2008). Comparable examples of such sickle blades were also identified at the above mentioned.

Fig. 3: Samples of Middle Paleolithic Levallois cores and flacks from Rahmati locality (Author, 2023). ▶

From the Neolithic period, when human communities began producing food under new climatic conditions while drawing upon earlier subsistence experiences, four settlements were identified: Deymeh, Bon Ghela, Afrineh 1, and Chenareh. No pottery sherds were recovered during the surface survey, and all four settlements were therefore attributed to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. The high frequency of blades and bladelets, together with numerous bullet-shaped cores, underscores the significance of these settlements during the Neolithic period (Fig. 5). Among these sites, Deymeh Tepe, covering approximately one hectare, and Bon Ghela Tepe are particularly noteworthy due to the high density of lithic artifacts, whereas the Chenareh site has been severely damaged and disturbed as a result of modern village construction over the mound. In addition to the predominantly chert lithic assemblages characteristic of the Neolithic, obsidian tools and debitage were also identified on the surfaces of the Deymeh and Afrineh 1 sites. Given the chronology of obsidian exploitation and its geological sources, these materials are likely to date to after 7200 BC (Darabi and Glascock, 2013). The lithic industries recovered from the surface of these sites are comparable to assemblages reported from other Zagros sites (Kozlowski and Aurenche, 2005), particularly those documented in the Central Zagros region (Bahrami et al., 2012; Darabi et al., 2011).

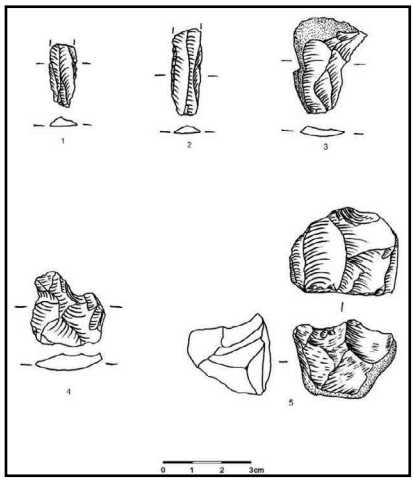
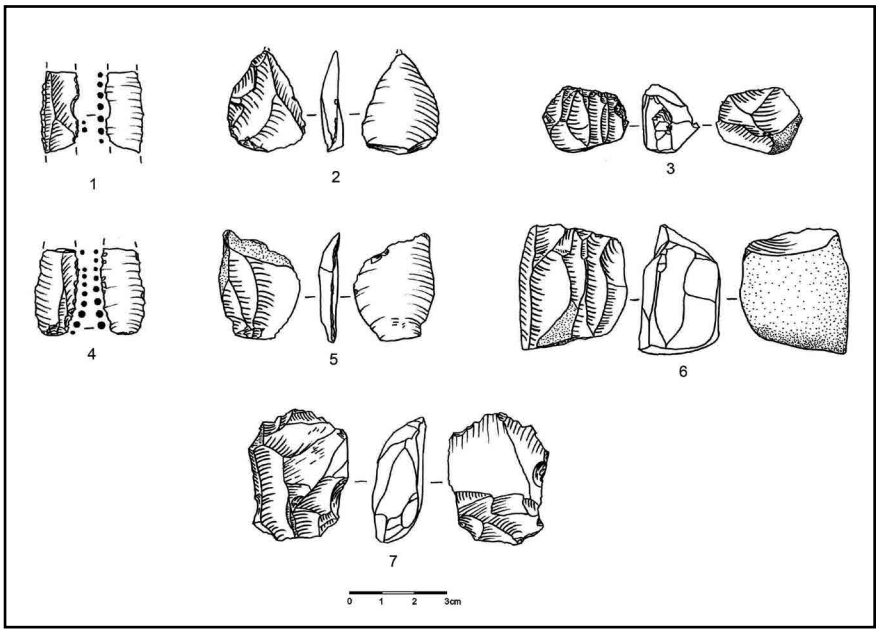
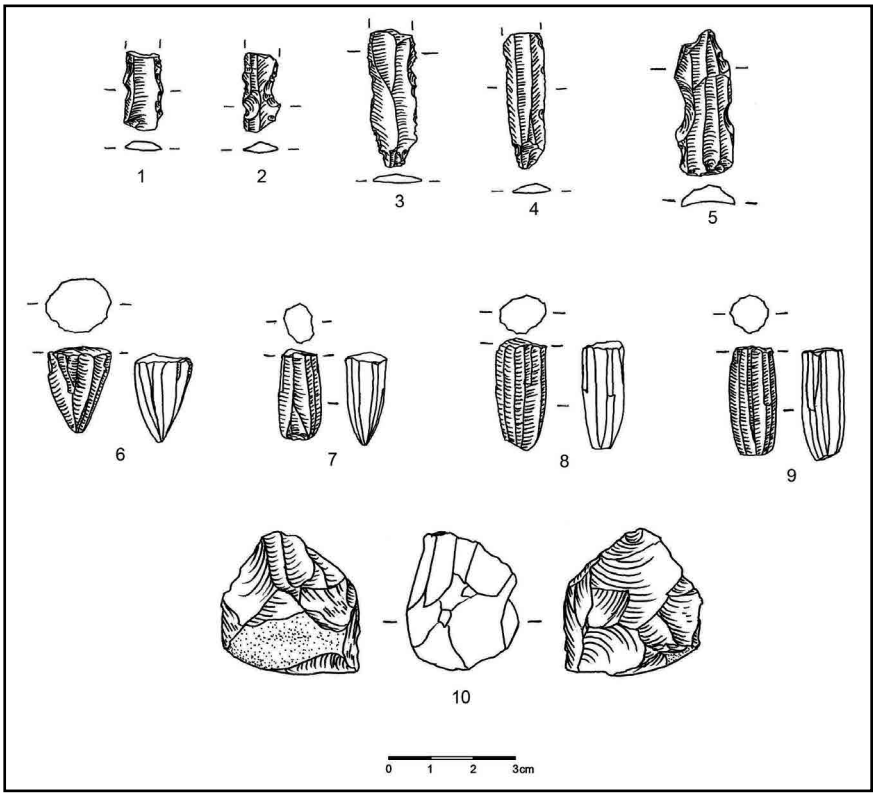


Fig. 4: Samples of stone tools from the Eshkaft Vezmya that probably belong to the Upper Paleolithic period (1 and 2. retouched blade, 3. borer, 4: notched flake, 5: mixed core) (Author, 2023). ▶



◄ Fig. 5: Samples of Epipaleolithic stone tools from the Zour Azma 2 site. (1 , 4: sickle blades; 2 , 5: borers; 3, 6 , 7: mixed flake and bladelet cores), (Author, 2023).



◄ Fig. 6. Sample of Neolithic stone tools from Tepe Deymeh. (1: side scraper on bladelets; 2: notched bladelet; 3: double side scraper; 4: Plain blade; 5: notched blade on bladelet core; 6-9: Bullet shaped core; 10: Mixed core) (Author, 2023).

From the Chalcolithic period (5500–3000 BC), the archaeological evidence recovered from the Miankouh region presents a different pattern. No sites were identified from the Early Chalcolithic period, during which the Bagh-e No cultural tradition was dominant in Lorestan. From the Middle Chalcolithic period, only four sites were identified: Bon-Ghela,

Nazar Alivand, Dawat Malga, and Deh Bozorg. In contrast to the preceding periods, the Late Chalcolithic period, particularly during the fourth millennium BC, exhibits a markedly different settlement pattern in the region. A total of 13 settlements were identified from this phase, including three large and central mounds, -Tepe Afrineh, Nasir Tepe Vashyan, and Cheshmeh Kogani- as well as several small or seasonal sites: Bagh-e Darband, Darband, Mintako, Ahmad Abad Cemetery, Tok-Tok Aow, Maz-Chokela, Bardbal, Pusht Tepe Gerdakaneh, Darkolen Cemetery, and Koul Sorkhmal 2. The most prominent of these is Tepe Afrineh, which was documented in pre-revolutionary surveys and discussed by Clare Goff (1971) under the title Pre-Iron Age Settlements of Lorestan. The pottery assemblage of this period (Fig. 7) can be compared with characteristic Late Uruk materials from the Central Zagros region, particularly Godin VI (Young, 1969). Among the ceramic forms, club-rimmed vessels (Nos. 3, 7) are comparable to similar examples from Godin VI (Young 1969, fig.

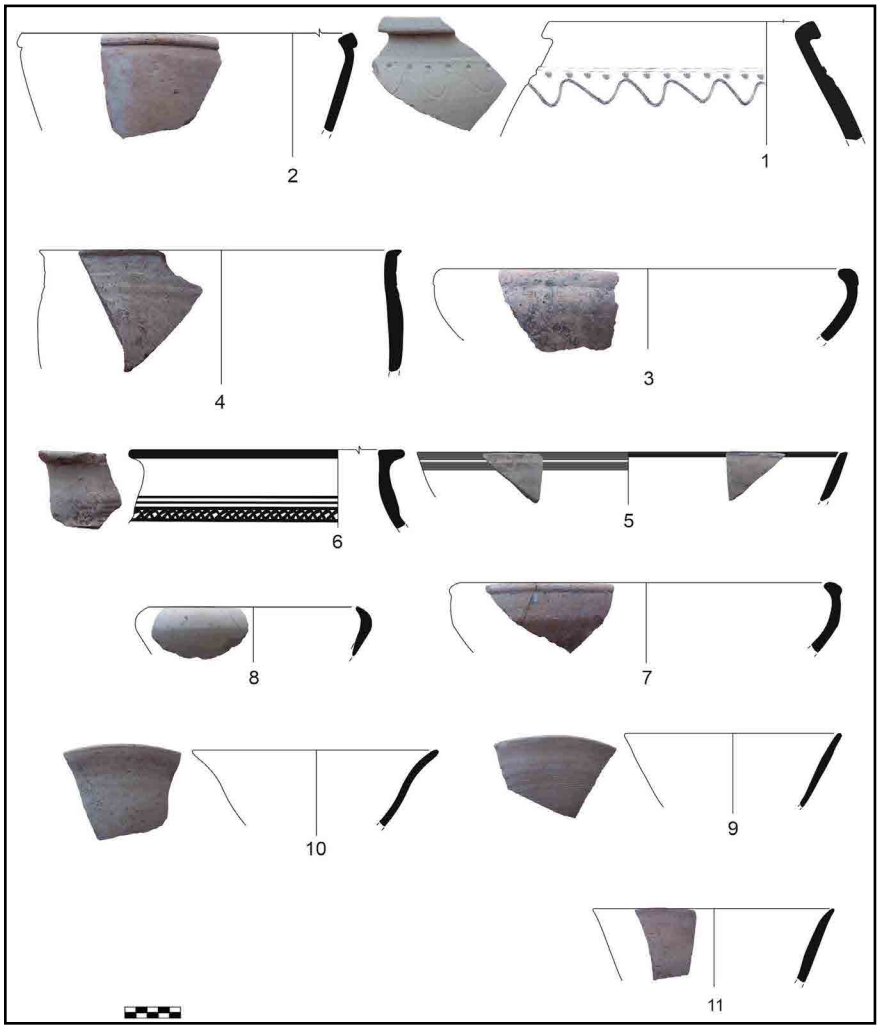


Fig. 7: Pottery sherds of Late Chalcolithic from Tepe Afrineh (Author, 2023). ▶

◄ Table 1. Characteristics of the potsherds recovered from Tepe Afrineh (Fig. 7), (Author, 2023).

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparison
1	rim	Buff-colored fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness, incised decoration	Late Chalcolithic	-
2	rim	Buff-colored fabric, orange-buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Goff, 1971: Fig. 5: 17-18
3	rim	Buff to dark-buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Goff, 1971: Fig. 7: 10-12; Young, 1969: Fig. 8:4, 12
4	rim	Buff to dark-buff fabric, thin buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	-
5	rim	Buff to dark-buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness, painted decoration	Late Chalcolithic	-
6	rim	Buff fabric, dark red slip, well-fired, handmade, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted decoration	Late Chalcolithic	Goff, 1971: Fig. 6: 34
7	rim	Buff to dark-buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Goff, 1971: Fig. 7:10-12; Young, 1969: Fig. 8:4,12
8	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Goff ,1971: Fig. 7: 2-6; Young, 1969: Fig. 8: 4,12
9	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Young, 1969: 69, Fig. 8: 22; Gopnik& Rothman, 2011: 123, Fig. 4.44: VI.1; Henrickson, 1994: 97, Fig. 3: 17, 22
10	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	Young, 1969: 69, Fig. 8: 3; Gopnik & Rothman, 2011: 124, Fig. 4.45: VI. 1, 2
11	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Late Chalcolithic	-

8:4, 12) and Babajan V (Goff 1971: fig. 7:10–12). Likewise, shallow bowls with inverted rims (No. 8), comparable to specimens from Kunji Cave in Khorramabad (Wright et al. 1975, fig. 6: m), have also been reported from Godin VI (Levine and Young 1987, fig. 17: 7, 13) and Babajan V (Goff, 1971, fig. 7: 2–6), which Goff identifies as belonging to the Uruk B phase (Ibid: 134).

Ten sites dating to the Bronze Age were identified, including both cemeteries and settlement sites. The Bronze Age cemeteries of this period exhibit a distinctive architectural tradition, characterized by the use of large stone blocks arranged in a gabled roof form. Among these burial grounds, only the Chemeshk cemetery preserved intact grave structures, which had been exposed by unauthorized excavations. As a result of looting activities, only a limited number of pottery sherds were recovered from these graves. Not far from this cemetery, the Chemeshk settlement mound was identified, dating to the Bronze Age and likely associated

with the cemetery. In addition to these two sites, Bronze Age material evidence was also documented at Darband (Fig. 8), Chal Kher Gelou, Ahmad Abad Cemetery, Ghelangari, Kord Ali, Sarab-e Abdul Ali, Dada Golab, and Chah-Shirin Ahmadi Cemetery. The ceramic assemblages from these sites fall within the broader cultural framework of the Bronze Age in Lorestan. Comparable materials have been reported from Kunji Cave in Khorramabad, attributed to the Lower Bronze Age (Emberling et al., 2002), as well as from the Godin III cultural horizon (Henrickson, 1987). The Godin III sequence, dated between 2600 and 1450 BC, corresponds to the Middle and Late Bronze Age. In terms of morphology and decorative treatment, the pottery of this period shows close parallels with the Godin III6 and III5 phases (Nos. 5, 10), which are contemporaneous with the Early Dynastic III period, the Babajan V phase, and Susa IVA. Henrickson

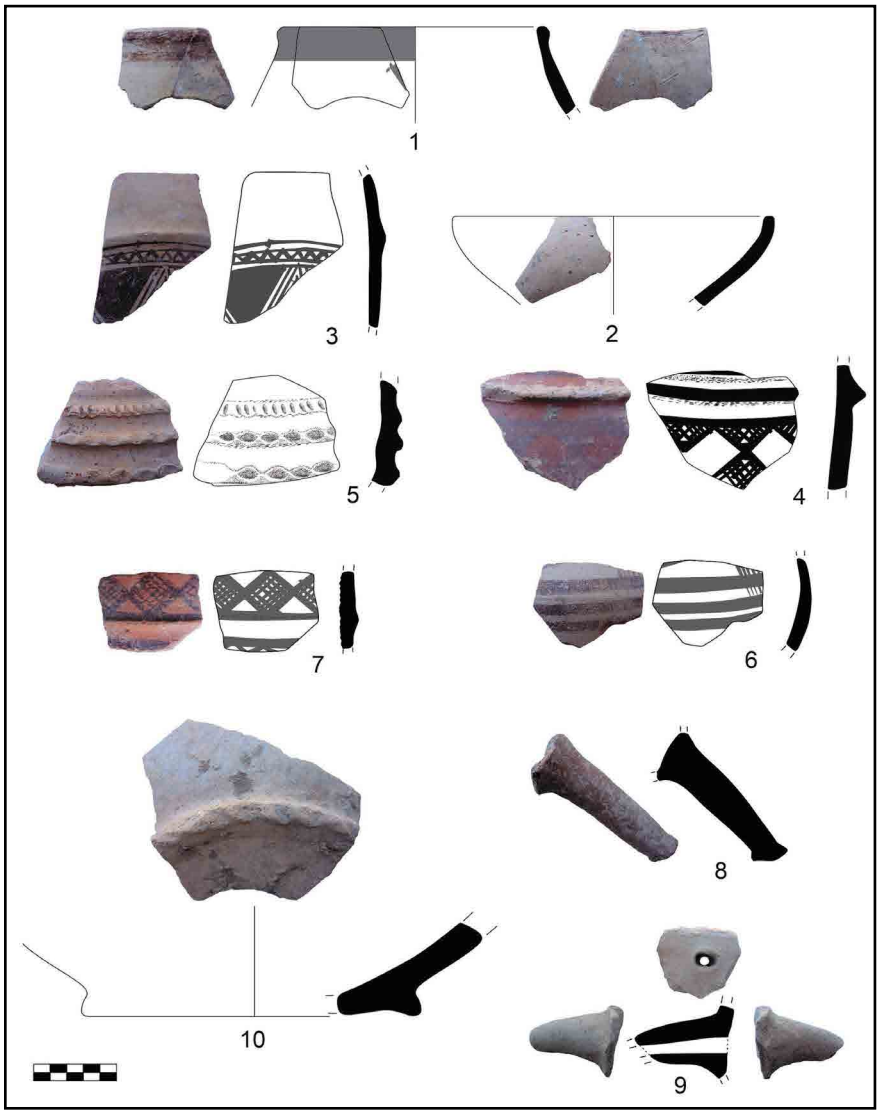


Fig. 8: Samples of Bronze Age potsherds from Darband (Author, 2023).▶

◄ **Table 2. Technical specification of potteries recovered from Darband (Fig. 8), (Author, 2023).**

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparison
1	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, carved decoration	Bronze Age	Henrickson, 1987, P: 92, Fig. 10: 9
2	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness	Bronze Age	Henrickson, 1987, P: 98, Fig. 16: 2-4
3	body	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Late Bronze Age	-
4	body	Buff fabric, red-dark slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Late Bronze Age	Henrickson, 1987, P: 91, Fig. 9: 1-2
5	body	Buff-orange fabric, buff-orange slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, added rope-pattern decoration	Middle Bronze Age	Henrickson, 1987, P: 96, Fig. 14
6	body	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Bronze Age	-
7	body	Orange-buff fabric, red-white slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Late Bronze Age	Gopnik, 2011, p: 252, Fig. 6.37a
8	spout	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, tripod stand	Middle Bronze Age	Schmidt *et al.*, 1989: Plate 93
9	spout	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, handmade, mixed temper, medium wall thickness, pipe vessel	-	-
10	base	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, rope pattern on bottom	Middle Bronze Age	Henrickson, 1987, P: 91, Fig. 9: 2

proposes a date for this cultural phase between the mid third millennium BC and approximately 2200 BC (Henrickson, 1987: 417 to 414). Several Bronze Age ceramics from the Miankouh region can further be attributed to the Godin III2 phase, dated to 1900 to 1600 BC. Pottery Nos. 3, 4, and 7, characterized by a pronounced shoulder projection, belong to this phase.

Evidence related to the Iron Age was identified at eight sites: Ghelacheh Sarsang, Nirkoo, Merow Hoshka 1 and 2, the cemetery of Bon Ghela, Mi-Gerowa, Bera Balikou, and Koul Sorkh Mal 1. The sites attributed to this period comprise both settlement areas and cemeteries. Among them, Koul Sorkh Mal 1 is particularly noteworthy, as, in addition to pottery sherds, stone blades and projectile points were collected from the surface. These materials are comparable to examples reported from the Pai Kool cemetery in Poshtkouh, Lorestan (Overlaet, 2013: 788), and the Sangtarashan site in

southern Khorramabad (Malekzadeh, 2008). At one of these sites, water erosion had partially cut through the mound, exposing the structure of a grave. From this exposed context, pottery sherds of the Genre Lorestan tradition were recovered, which are comparable to Babajan III ceramics (Goff, 1978) and to materials from the lower strata of Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in Khorramabad (Bahrami, 2022).

Historical Period Sites

As the result of survey, settlement evidence was identified from the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid historical periods (Fig. 9). Among these, three sites, Malga Sha Cemetery, Tepe Roustayeh Malga Sha, and Takht-e Shir Hill 1, belong to the Achaemenid period, as they yielded pottery types characteristic of this era, including the so-called carinated (boat-shaped) bowls. These forms are comparable to the examples obtained from Pasargadae (Stronach, 2000) and Susa (Stronach, 1974). Notably, Achaemenid pottery is largely absent in central Lorestan, and it is most likely that the presence of such wares in southern Lorestan reflects the proximity of this region to the Susiana Plain. From the Seleucid period,

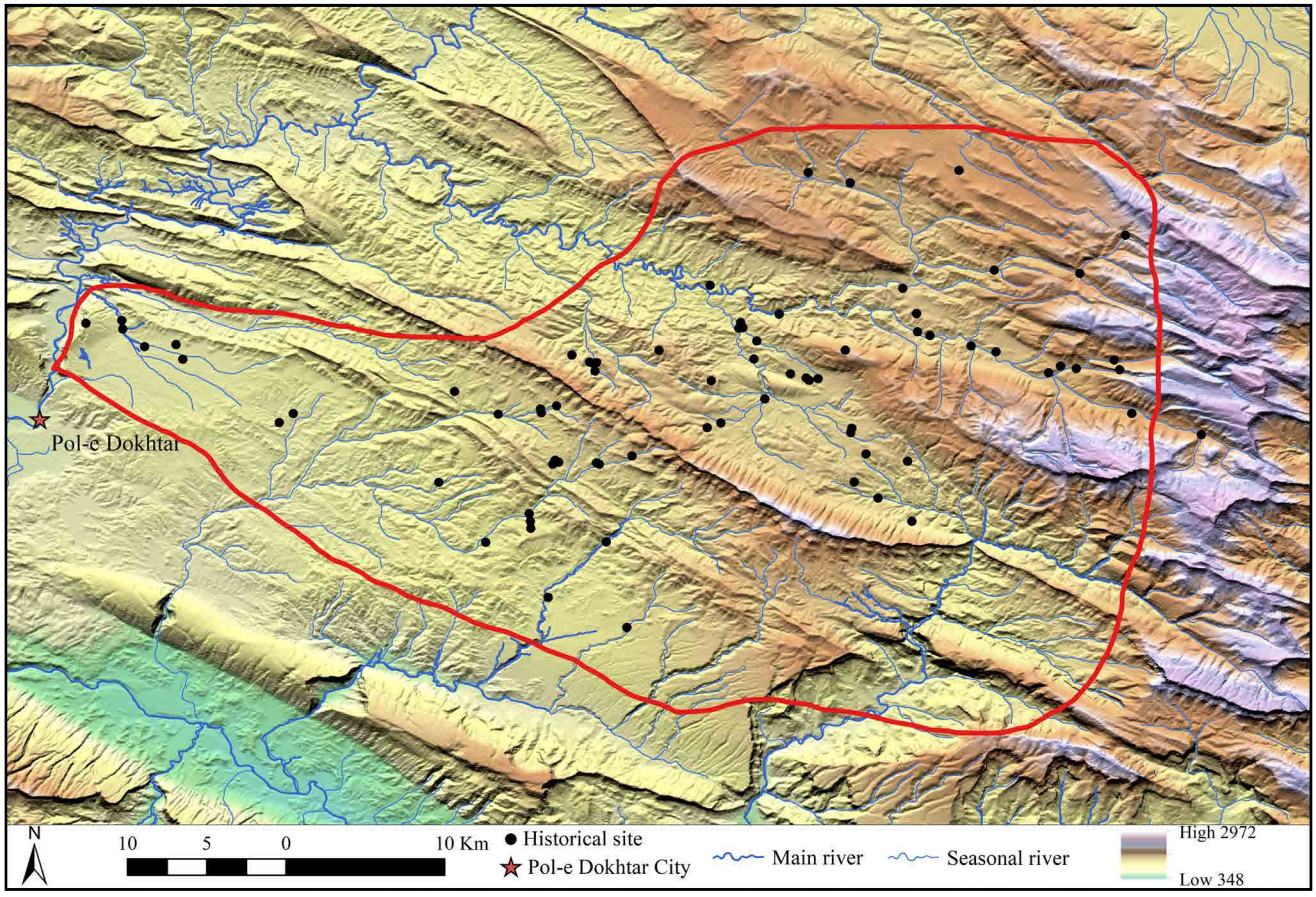
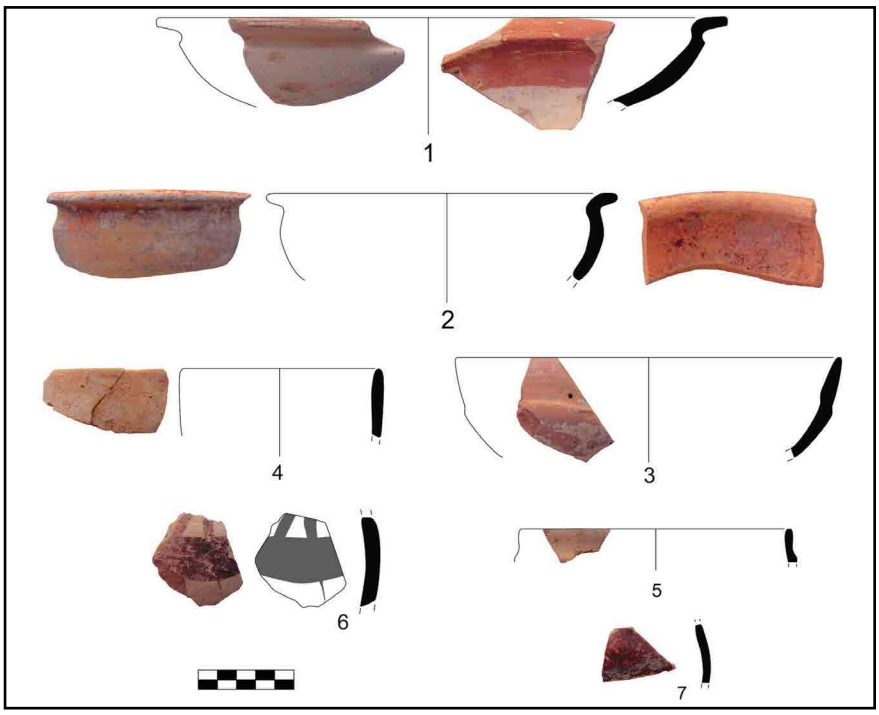


Fig. 9: Distribution of identified historical sites within the survey area (Map: H. Ghobadizadeh). ▼

six ancient sites were identified, characterized by finely fired, thin, cream-colored pottery incorporating a mixture of fine minerals and decorated in ochre, brown, and dark tones (Fig. 10).



◄ **Fig. 10: Samples of Seleucid-related potsherds recovered from Tepe Heraskah, (Author, 2023).**

◄ **Table 3. Technical specification of pottery sherds from Heraskah (Fig. 10), (Author, 2023).**

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparision
1	rim	Buff fabric, buff-white slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Seleucid	Rahbar, *et al.*, 2014: Pl. 5
2	rim	Orange-white fabric, orange-white slip, well-fired, handmade, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Seleucid	Rahbar et al., 2014: Pl. 5
3	rim	Red-orange fabric, red-orange slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness, painted	Seleucid	-
4	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Seleucid	-
5	rim	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, thin wall thickness	Seleucid	-
6	body	Buff to dark-buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, painted	Seleucid	Rahbar et al., 2014: Pl. 5
7	body	Orange fabric, red-dark slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness, painted	Seleucid	Rahbar et al., 2014: Pl. 5

One characteristic form of this period is the thermos, a broken example of which was recovered at the Aow Madian site in Western Miankouh (Bahrami, 2020: 541). These samples are comparable to pottery from Sorkh Dom Laki in Kouhdasht (Shishehgar, 2004: 190). Seleucid-period pottery has also been reported from prominent sites including Laodicea in Nahavand (Rahbar et al., 2014: Pl. 5, 6), Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in the Khorramabad Valley (Bahrami et al., 2015), Noushijan (Stronach, 1974: Pl. LV.7), Sorkh-Dom Laki (Shishehgar, 2004) in western Iran, and Susa in the Khuzestan Plain (Bucharlat, 1987; De Miroschidji, 1987). The presence of settlement evidence from this period in the Miankouh region, alongside the aforementioned sites, demonstrates the existence of connections between the Susiana Plain and western Iran via this communication route and underscores its historical importance.

The conditions of the Miankouh region during the Parthian and Sassanid periods appear broadly comparable to those of the preceding periods. One of the prominent features of the region in these periods, which continued into the later Islamic era, is the construction of governmental and defensive architectural complexes adjacent to settlement areas. All of these structures were built of rubble stone bonded with plaster mortar. From the Parthian period, 43 sites were identified that yielded characteristic ceramic assemblages of this era, including buff wares decorated with light brown painted motifs from the early phase of the period and the distinctive so-called “Clinky” wares (Fig. 11) attributed to the Middle and Late Parthian phases (Haerinck, 1997). These ceramics are comparable to characteristic Parthian types documented at Yazdgerd Castle (Keall & Keall, 1981),

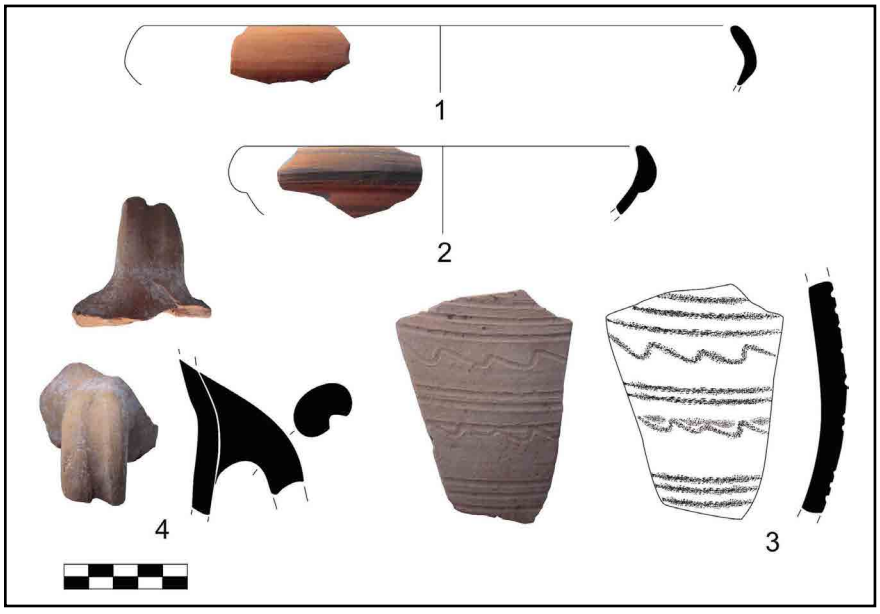


Fig. 11: Samples of Parthian period pottery from the Ghazal Village Tepe (Author, 2023). ▶

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparison
1	rim	Gray fabric, orange-white slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness	Parthian	Haerinck, 1997: Fig. 15: 4; Alibeigi, 2011: 158, Fig. 4: 3
2	rim	Gray fabric, orange-white slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness	Parthian	Haerinck, 1983, Fig. 8: 15
3	body	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness, carved decoration	Parthian	Haerinck, 1983: Fig. 14: 2; Keal & Keal, 1981: Fig. 28: 21-22
4	handle	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Parthian	-

◄ **Table 4: Typological specification of potteries from Ghazal Village Tepe (Fig. 11), (Author, 2023).**

Bisotun (Klais, 2006), and the Temple of Laodicea at Nahavand (Rahbar & Alibeigi, 2011). In addition to the ceramic evidence, defensive architectural remains of this period have also been documented in the region. Notable examples include Ghalacheh Kamancheh, located atop Ghalacheh Mount at an elevation of approximately 2000 m on the right side of the entrance to the Darband Strait, as well as Abshoureh Mehr Castle and Dehgah Hill.

From the Sassanid period and the early centuries of Islam, 22 sites were identified. Of these, seven architectural complexes and castles were recorded: Ghela Kush Kharan, Ghelacheh Gholamreza, Ghela Deh-Bozorg, Ghela Baraftab, Ghela Chemeshk, Ghela Darbaghe, and Ghela Khalil Akbar, in addition to several settlement sites, the most significant of which is the Dareh Shahr site (Fig. 12). At these sites, pressed, incised, and applied decorative techniques are particularly prominent. The most common decorative motifs include fish-scale patterns, linear rope designs, applied strips bearing finger-impressed marks, and wavy lines. The majority of the ceramics are thin to medium in thickness, with vessel rims or bases sloping outward. The pottery assemblage from this period is comparable to characteristic types reported from Yazdgerd Fortress (Keall & Keall, 1981) and the city of Barzqavaleh, Seymareh (Sharifi, 2015). As in the Parthian period, the presence of substantial architectural remains and defensive fortifications dating to the Sassanid era reflects the strategic and communicative importance of this region.

Islamic Period Sites

The Miankouh region retained its significance throughout the Islamic period, as evidenced by abundant extant remains of architectural structures, fortified citadels, and caravanserais situated alongside settlement sites. A total of 16 sites dating to this period were identified (Fig. 13). Among these, eight settlements yielded characteristic pottery diagnostic of the Seljuk

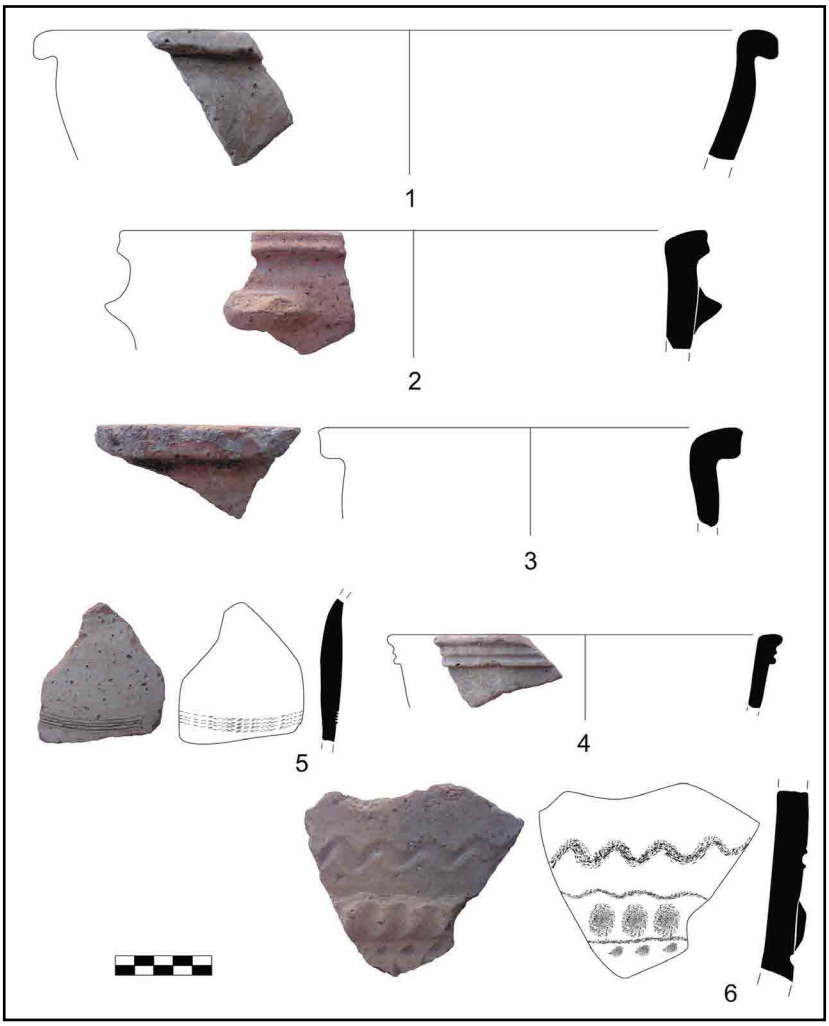
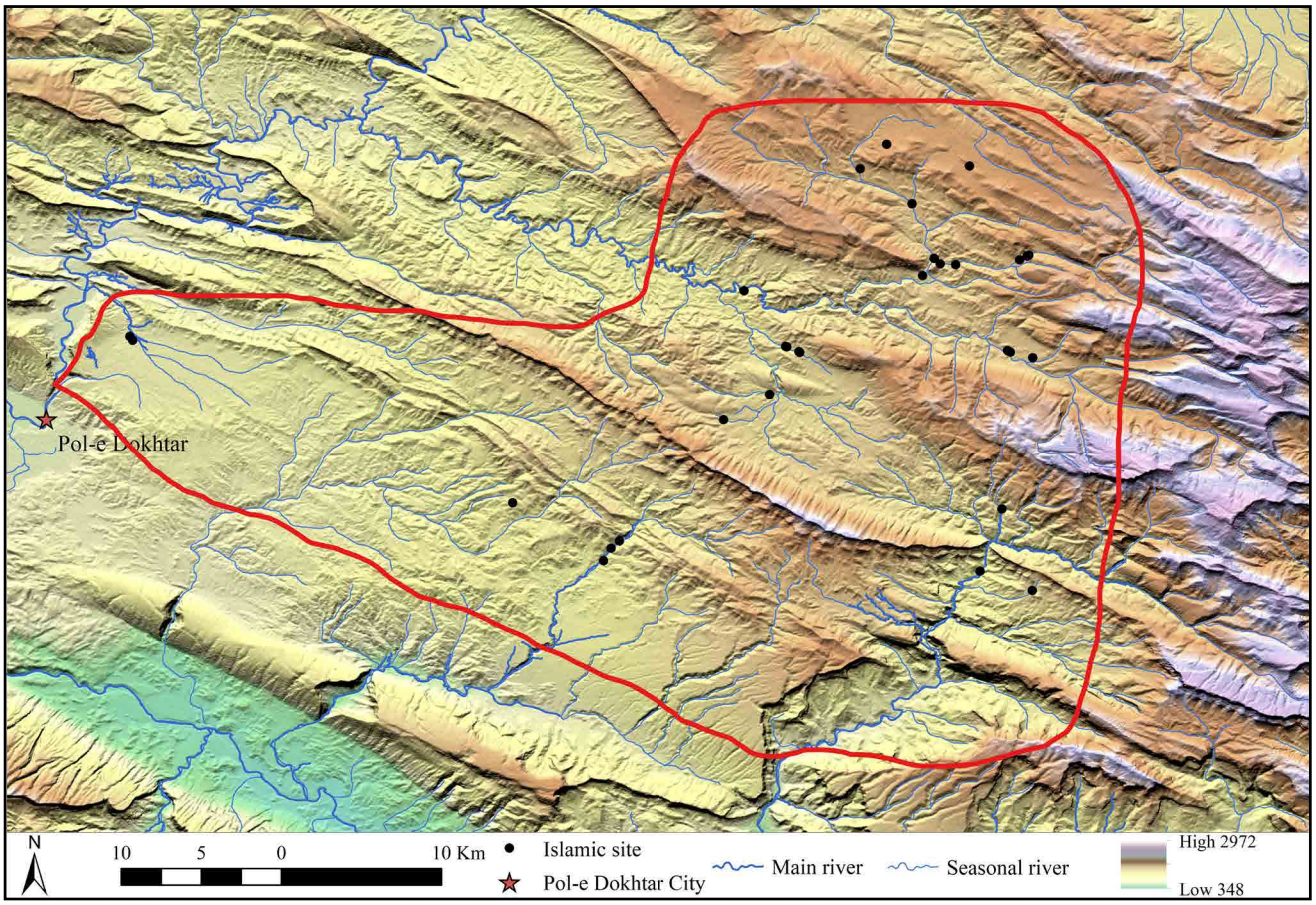


Fig. 12: Samples of Sassanid period pottery from Darreh Shahr (Author, 2023). ▶

Table 5: Technical specification potteries of Dare Shahr site (Fig. 12), (Author, 2023). ▶

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparison
1	rim	Orange-buff fabric, orange-buff to whitish slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Sassanid	Whitcomb, 1985: Fig. 53. no. r
2	rim	Orange to whitish fabric, orange-white slip, well-fired, handmade, lime and sand temper, medium wall thickness	Sassanid	Tajbakhsh & Azarnoush, 2013: 223, Fig. 1
3	rim	Buff fabric, buff to orange slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Sassanid	-
4	rim	Buff to orange fabric, light buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Sassanid	Whitcomb, 1985: Fig. 23, no. f
5	body	Buff fabric, buff to whitish slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, incised decoration	Sassanid	Keall & Keall, 1981: Fig. 28: 26
6	body	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, applied and incised decoration	Sassanid	Keall & Keall 1981: Fig. 28: 20



▲ **Fig. 13. Distribution of identified Islamic sites within the study area (Map: H. Ghobadizadeh).**

period (roughly the 5th to 7th centuries AH). The most prominent ceramic types included turquoise-glazed wares and plainwares featuring molded decorative designs. Furthermore, fritware (stonepaste) vessels of various types have been documented across Lorestan, including monochrome specimens finished in lapis lazuli, cobalt, and turquoise glazes. The use of this specific fabric ends in the 7th century AH, with several examples recovered from the sites under study (Fig. 14: 8). Monochrome green sgraffiato wares have also been recorded in various parts of Iran and Lorestan (Ibid). This assemblage has been dated to the Seljuk and Middle Islamic periods (Henshaw, 2010: 165; Whitcomb, 1985). During this era, carved arabesque motifs emerged on the exterior surfaces of the pottery (Fig. 14: 4); such motifs were identified at several sites within the Miankouh survey (Fig. 14: 1, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10). Notable among the other sites identified in the Miankouh region is the architectural complex in the Kogan district. At this location, in addition to Kogan Cave, which represents a significant example of rock-cut architecture in Iran and has undergone extensive prior investigation, evidence of a defensive stronghold was examined on the summit of the mountain housing the cave. A study of the ceramic corpus,

specifically the green, azure, and monochrome sgraffiato wares, alongside fritware, arabesque carved motifs, and comb-incised decorations, indicates a chronology spanning the Middle Islamic period (Fig. 14).

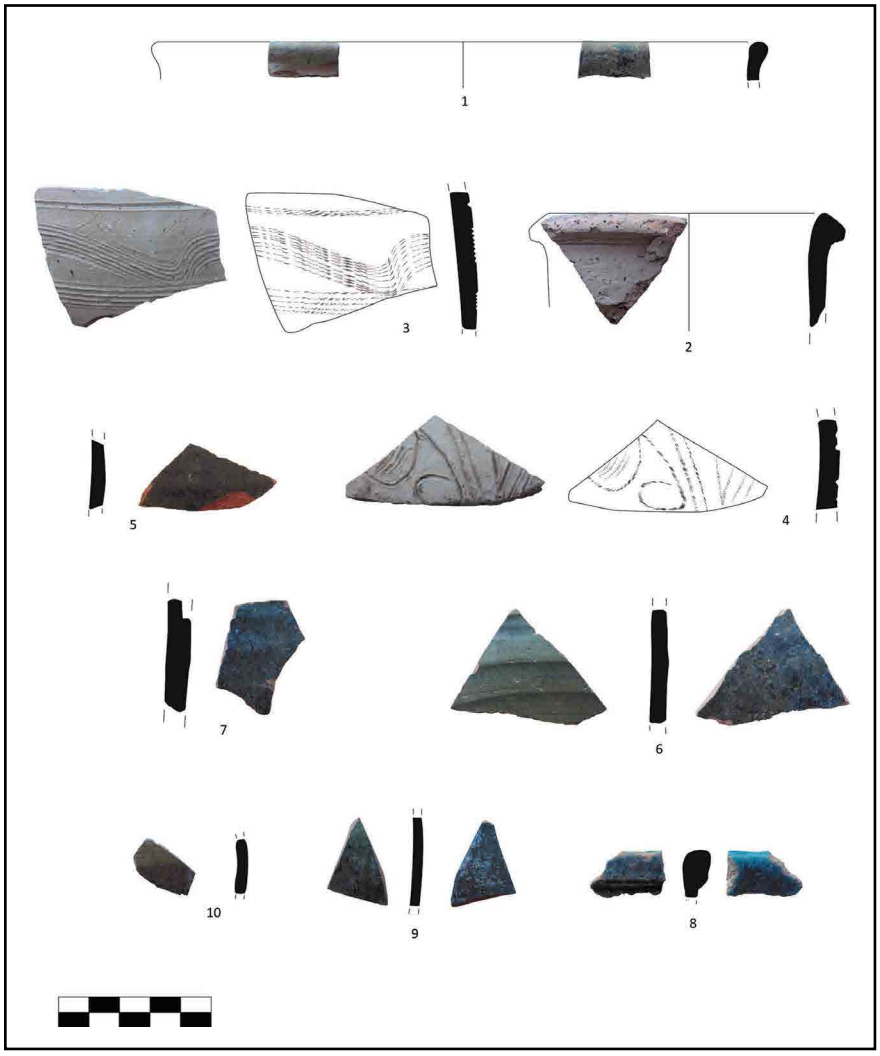


Fig. 14: Samples of middle Islamic period pottery from Catle-Cave of Kogan (Author, 2023). ▶

Table 6: Typological specifications of potteries from Castle-Cave of Kogan (Fig. 14), (Author, 2023). ▶

No	Type	Description	Chronology	Comparison
1	rim	Buff-orange fabric, green glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Henshaw, 2010: 165, Fig. 5, 20
2	rim	Buff-orange fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Middle Islamic	-
3	body	Buff fabric, buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness, carved decoration	Middle Islamic	Whitcomb, 1985: 59, Fig. 20: h
4	body	Buff fabric, thin buff slip, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness, carved vegetal decoration	Middle Islamic	Whitcomb, 1985: 69, Fig. 24: h

5	body	Buff-orange fabric, green glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Henshaw, 2010: 165, Fig. 5, 20
6	body	Buff-orange fabric, green glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Henshaw, 2010: 165, Fig. 5, 20
7	body	Buff-orange fabric, green glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, medium wall thickness	Middle Islamic	-
8	rim	Buff fabric, turquoise glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, sand temper, medium wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Alizadeh, 2014, Plate 92: D
9	body	Buff fabric, green glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Henshaw, 2010: 165, Fig. 5, 20
10	body	Buff fabric, yellow glaze on both surfaces, well-fired, wheel-made, soft sand temper, thin wall thickness	Middle Islamic	Alizadeh, 2012: Plate 101: D

Of the eight identified sites dating to the late Islamic centuries, four are the Chemeshk Caravanserai (Fig. 15), Ghela Nasir, Aowsar, and Mishvan, all located along the route from Khorramabad towards Khuzestan. These caravanserais belong to the Safavid period. Approximately 300 meters to the southeast of the Chemeshk Caravanserai stand the remains of a ruined minaret. Given its proximity to the structure, it was probably built contemporaneously to serve as a landmark to guide caravans. Within the village of Ghela Nasir, a fortified stronghold and administrative building were constructed in previous centuries by a regional Khan named Nasir. The remains of its towers and walls still stand today. In addition to the aforementioned structures, evidence of two further defensive fortresses was

◄ **Fig. 15. Chemeshk Caravanserai on the side of the freeway and the Ghazal River (Author, 2023).**

documented, which belonged to the local Khans during the Early Pahlavi period. One of these is the Esfandiar Khan Fortress, constructed using stone and gypsum mortar. The other is the Ali Morad Khan Castle, which is composed of mud brick. Both fortifications feature four round towers at the cardinal corners and incorporate defined entrances, residential spaces, ancillary annexes, and warehouses.

Discussion

The cultural richness of the Miankouh region reflects its high ecological potential and its pivotal role as a link between two distinct and contrasting environments: the lowland Susiana plain and the high mountains of Lorestan. This transitional positioning underscores the significance of its archaeological record. Based on the recovered cultural remains and their chronology, it can be concluded that the Miankouh region, a constituent of the larger Balagriveh territory, was first occupied by Neanderthal populations. The highest density of settlement sites dates to this period. Whether this intensive presence reflects the region's role as a migratory corridor, and whether these hominids moved between the Susiana plains in the south and the northern mountains in response to seasonal changes, remains a subject for further specialized research, particularly in the southern regions bordering Khuzestan. The identification of 32 settlement sites assigned to the Middle Paleolithic period, when viewed within the context of Central Zagros studies, indicates the importance of this geographic zone in the evolutionary developments of the era and the existence of a significant Neanderthal population. The probable presence of Upper Paleolithic lithic industries and evidence of Homo sapiens at Eshkaft-e Vezmiya, alongside prolific Middle Paleolithic assemblages, may address key questions regarding the timing and nature of the transition from Neanderthal to Homo sapiens populations in the Zagros. This potential must be verified through systematic scientific excavations.

During the Neolithic period, following the transition from hunting and gathering to food production and sedentism, the Miankouh region remained a focal point for pastoral and agricultural communities. The lithic assemblages recovered from the four identified settlements, characterized by an abundance of bullet cores, blades, and bladelets, alongside obsidian samples, are comparable to material from western and southwestern Iranian sites such as Kallek Asad Morad, Tepe Abdul Hosein, Ali Kosh, and Tule-i. Given the established chronologies of these sites and the absence of ceramics within the Miankouh settlements, it is highly likely that these occupations date to the late 9th to early 7th millennium BC. Following the

Neolithic, and despite the cultural flourishing of Lorestan and Susiana in the late 6th and 5th millennia BC (including the Bagh-e-No, Daraei, and Middle/Late Susiana cultures), the Miankouh region appears to have been less utilized by human societies. Consequently, only diffuse evidence has been documented from the Middle Chalcolithic II.

Unlike the previous era, the Late Chalcolithic period (4th millennium BC) witnessed a significant degree of cultural homogeneity between Susiana and the Central Zagros. Simultaneously with the spread of the Uruk culture, this region played a pivotal intermediary and connecting role between the lowland Susiana plain and the Lorestan highlands. In addition to ephemeral nomadic sites, evidence of this period was identified at several mounded sites featuring permanent architectural remains. The most notable and significant among these is Tepe Afrineh, which stands as a prominent tell with a height of more than 10 meters. This site contains visible architectural sequences and stratified levels exposed within the deep trenches and cuts created by illicit excavations. Tepe Afrineh most likely functioned as a strategic hub for providing security and facilitating regional communication between Susiana and the Central Zagros during the Susa II and Godin VI cultural horizons.

In the Bronze Age, human activity is manifested through two distinct archaeological aspects: residential settlement sites and extensive necropolises characterized by megalithic stone-built tombs. One highly distinctive and interesting feature of the Miankouh settlements during this period is the observed co-occurrence of pottery from the final phase of the Late Chalcolithic (Godin V) alongside diagnostic Bronze Age ceramic data and assemblages. Notable examples of this transitional phase include the Darband site and the Ahmad Abad cemetery. This stratigraphic situation, observed across several sites and cemeteries, strongly suggests the possibility of long-term cultural continuity and uninterrupted permanent settlement from the Chalcolithic and Jemdet Nasr periods directly into the Bronze Age within this region. However, this comprehensive survey yielded no primary cultural evidence of polychrome pottery of the specific Jemdet Nasr type, despite such wares being previously documented and reported in areas of the Lorestan Posht-Kuh and at Kunji Cave near Khorramabad (Haerinck, 2011).

Based on the cultural remains and diagnostic artifacts recovered from various sites in the Miankouh region, it is evident that the Iron Age communities of Lorestan were actively present in this territory. In addition to the ubiquitous pottery sherds found at nearly all sites, significant

evidence of stone arrowheads characteristic of this period was obtained. These lithic artifacts, which parallel those previously reported at the Pay-Koul cemetery in Posht-Kuh and the Sangtarashan site in Khorramabad, were recovered from the Koul Sorkh Mal 1 site located in the southernmost point of the study area within the Takht-Cho region, north of Mount Kialo. The presence of these artifacts serves as a direct reflection of the broad cultural homogeneity prevalent across Lorestan during this era. Additionally, diagnostic evidence of pottery known as the "Genre of Lorestan," closely associated with the Baba Jan III period, was identified within an Iron Age grave at the Nirkou site in the Taei region. According to the interpretations of researchers such as Goff and Medvedskaya, this archaeological occurrence may serve as a clear indication of the extent of Ellipian political influence and territorial presence within the eastern Miankouh region.

Upon entering the historical era, specifically during the Achaemenid and Epi-Achaemenid periods, the Miankouh region remains relatively under-reported compared to other regions of Lorestan. In those neighboring areas, significant pottery and settlement evidence has traditionally been identified at important sites such as Takht-Shir 1 and Heraskah. Quite notably, these sites in our study area are situated exclusively in the western Miankouh rural district; consequently, no occupations or archaeological footprints from this period were identified in eastern Miankouh. This distributional situation is also mirrored in the records from central Lorestan, the fundamental reason for which remains currently obscure and hidden from our understanding. While this settlement scarcity is specific to the Achaemenid period, the Epi-Achaemenid and Seleucid horizons present a different archaeological record. Similar to other surveyed areas in the Miankouh region, cream painted pottery has also been reported in the stratigraphic excavations of Falak-ol-Aflak Castle, Sorkh-Dom Laki, and various other prominent localities.

The archaeological landscape becomes completely different during the Parthian period. During this epoch, we witness a significant and marked increase in the total number of settlements, representing new demographic conditions that are clearly reflected in the rich data obtained from these systematic surveys. Undoubtedly, the most important category of material culture for these archaeological studies is pottery. The characteristic ware introduced and utilized during the early Parthian period in western Iran is the distinctive buff pottery decorated with light brown motifs. As the period progressed into the middle and late Parthian phases, these were

replaced by the well-known and diagnostic Clinky pottery (Haerinck, 1997). During this time, we witness the initial formation of defensive and potentially administrative-governmental architectural structures in the Miankouh region for the first time. Some of these defensive architectural structures, such as Ghalecheh Kamancheh, are located precariously on the summits of mountains. These peaks are very difficult to access and easy to defend, which strongly implies that such sites had exclusively military and defensive uses. Others, such as the Ghale-e Roustaye Khalil Akbar 1 and 2, were built on lower ridges. These sites, in addition to having inherent defensive capabilities, probably served more complex roles as administrative-governmental centers.

This settlement pattern established during the Parthian period was repeated in the later Sassanid and Islamic periods, providing a direct reflection of the strategic importance of the Miankouh region as a vital communication route between Khuzestan and Lorestan throughout these periods. In the Sassanid and Islamic periods, in addition to settlement sites without visible extant architectural structures, the most important of which is the Dareh Shahr site, military and defensive castles and citadels can be seen situated on the heights of the region. These fortifications existed alongside administrative and government structures built in the more accessible flat areas. It appears that these two distinct types of architectural structures together played a vital complementary role, especially when considering the often incompatible or volatile political conditions in the region throughout these centuries.

Since the Miankouh region possesses a rugged mountainous and difficult geography, this terrain, combined with its important communication role, provided favorable grounds for the activities of bandits and frequent attacks on travelers. These administrative and defensive structures are a physical reflection of the aforementioned security conditions. In this organizational system, people living in the primary government centers would likely settle in the upland defensive castles in times of danger or during an attack by bandits and other enemies to stay safe and confront the threat. Considering the use of local materials in the construction of these architectural structures, which consist mostly of rubble stone and gypsum plaster mortar, it is very difficult to determine the precise date of construction for these structures based solely on the materials themselves. Therefore, the only possible way to ascertain a reliable date was through the analysis of pottery finds, even though some of these diagnostic sherds were very rare.

This situation underwent a significant transformation during the Safavid period, coinciding with the political stability brought about by a strong central government and empowered local authorities. Consequently, several caravanserais were established along this route to facilitate traffic and provide essential services to traveling parties. The extant remains of these structures can still be observed along the route, specifically the Chemeshk (Fig. 15), Ghela Nasir, Aowsar, and Mishvan complexes. These caravanserais were strategically established at specific intervals determined by geographical conditions. The most significant of them, which has survived to the present day and undergone restoration by the Lorestan Cultural Heritage Organization, is the Chemeshk caravanserai. This structure is situated on the northern side of a narrow strait of the same name, adjacent to the confluence of the Chemeshk and Ghazal rivers.

The placement of the caravanserai was intended to ensure proximity to downstream water sources along the river, yet the local topography made it somewhat difficult for travelers to locate the site easily. To rectify this and guide the caravans effectively, the builders erected a navigational pillar on the summit of a natural mound approximately 300 meters southeast of the main complex. It is plausible that the construction of this marker occurred after the caravanserai was completed, perhaps in response to the difficulties encountered by merchants in finding the installation. Since this communication route remained vital prior to the construction of the Khorramabad-Mamoulan-Pol-e Dokhtar road during the Early Pahlavi era, it was largely controlled by local Khans during the Qajar period. These regional leaders commissioned residential and defensive strongholds to secure the territory. A prominent example is the Nasir Fortress, located in the village of the same name, which was commissioned by Nasir. Subsequent structures were built by his descendants, including the Esfandyar Fortress in Reykhan 1 and the Ali Morad Khan Fortress in Dada Nosrat.

Conclusion

The Miankouh region is situated in the eastern portion of Pol-e Dokhtar County, within southern Lorestan Province. Based on the archaeological data recovered from identified sites and settlements, the Miankouh region represents one of the few geographical zones containing diverse evidence across nearly every cultural horizon, spanning from the Middle Paleolithic to the late Islamic centuries. The significance of Miankouh was first established during the Middle Paleolithic, coinciding with the presence of Neanderthal populations in the Near East. A total of 32 sites yielding

diagnostic lithic industries from this era have been identified. Undoubtedly, the persistent occupation by human societies throughout most prehistoric and historical periods into contemporary centuries reflects more than the high ecological potential of the region. It clearly underscores the critical role of this territory as a strategic corridor connecting the lowland, arid Susiana plain in the south with the northern Khorramabad Valley, which serves as a central hub within the Lorestan highlands.

The underlying factors contributing to this significance have varied across each successive era. In the epochs preceding the Neolithic revolution and the subsequent transition to food production, Paleolithic societies, subsisting on hunting, gathering, and the exploitation of wild resources from the northern mountains and southern plains, highly utilized the biological diversity of the Miankouh region. During the Neolithic period, as human populations transitioned toward animal husbandry and agriculture through the domestication of caprines, wheat, and barley, the Miankouh region retained its prominence. It served as a vital corridor and a primary destination for burgeoning nomadic herders. With the conclusion of the Neolithic period and the emergence of the Bagh-e No culture during the second half of the sixth millennium and the first half of the fifth millennium BC, a shift occurred. Likely due to the localized expansion of sedentary life, the interregional connections between Khuzestan and Lorestan diminished, resulting in an apparent occupational gap within the Miankouh region. This disruption did not last long; by the Middle Chalcolithic, and more notably during the Late Chalcolithic period in the fourth millennium BC, the landscape shifted again. Simultaneously with the onset of urbanization, isolated settlements gave way to widespread communication networks. The formation of sites like Tepe Afrineh represented a key mechanism for establishing security along this strategic communication route. In the Bronze and Iron Ages, we witness the further expansion of nomadism, evidence for which has been recovered from both residential settlements and extant cemeteries. One of the noteworthy features of the Bronze Age settlements in this region is the synchronous presence of Late Chalcolithic pottery alongside Bronze Age ceramic assemblages. The detailed study of this material overlap may elucidate the complex transition from the Chalcolithic to the Bronze Age within the broader context of Lorestan.

The Miankouh region during the Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic periods witnessed the emergence of central governments, a development accompanied by the establishment of administrative centers and military fortresses alongside ordinary settlements. This spatial organization

underscores the great importance of communication routes regarding military and commercial logistics. The existence of nearly 20 sites featuring defensive and administrative architecture, as well as related structures, further emphasizes the pivotal role of this region in establishing connectivity between Khuzestan and Lorestan. This network reached its peak of prosperity during the Safavid period with the creation of a comprehensive network of caravanserais. This traditional route only fell into decline approximately one century ago during the Early Pahlavi period, when the Khorramabad - Pol-e Dokhtar and Khuzestan highway was created along the Kashkan River valley. However, in recent years, with the construction of the Khorramabad - Pol-e Zal highway traversing this region, it has regained its former significance and strategic prominence. The modern infrastructure effectively mirrors the ancient transit corridors, revitalizing the historical landscape.

Acknowledgments

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Conflict of Interest

The Author, while observing publication ethics in referencing, declare the absence of conflict of interest.

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روند شکل‌گیری و تحول استقرارهای باستانی در منطقهٔ میان‌کوه شهرستان پلدختر، لرستان

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چکیده

شهرستان پلدختر در جنوب استان لرستان و در مرزهای شمالی خوزستان واقع شده است. پژوهش حاضر برآیند بررسی دو دهستان میان‌کوه شرقی و غربی این شهرستان است. این دو دهستان با مساحت حدود هزار کیلومترمربع بخش شرقی پلدختر را شامل می‌شوند. محدودهٔ بررسی به‌جز دو دشت کوچک واشیان در کنارهٔ شمال‌شرق شهر پلدختر و دادآباد در مرز شمالی شهرستان با خرم‌آباد، فاقد دشت‌های حاصلخیز است و بیشتر کوهستانی با دره‌ها و گردنه‌های صعب‌العبور است؛ با این‌وجود، این منطقه به‌دلیل واقع‌شدن در مسیر ارتباطی دشت خوزستان به زاگرس‌مرکزی و فلات‌مرکزی همواره در دوره‌های مختلف فرهنگی موردتوجه جوامع انسانی بوده است. با مطالعهٔ یافته‌های بررسی، ما شاهد شناخت مواد فرهنگی از بیشتر دوره‌های باستان‌شناسی بودیم. در پایان بررسی و با تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌های باستانی تعداد ۱۷۸ اثر فرهنگی از دوره‌های گوناگون پیش‌ازتاریخی، تاریخی و اسلامی شناسایی شد. از این تعداد ۸۸ اثر مربوط به ادوار پیش از تاریخ، ۷۵ اثر مربوط به ادوار تاریخی و ۳۰ اثر متعلق به دوران اسلامی بودند. از مهم‌ترین یافته‌های این بررسی، شناسایی بیش از ۵۰ استقرار از دوره‌های گوناگون عصر سنگ بود که در نوع خود جالب‌توجه بود و نشانهٔ توجه جدی گروه‌های انسانی در این دوره‌ها به منطقهٔ میان‌کوه است. هم‌چنین شناسایی نزدیک به ۲۰ ساختار معماری دفاعی-اداری متعلق به دوره‌های تاریخی و اسلامی و احداث چندین کاروانسرا در طول این مسیر در دورهٔ صفویه، نشانه‌ای از اهمیت ارتباطی آن در دوره‌های متأخر اسلامی است. از دیگر آثار ارزشمند محدودهٔ بررسی غار تمام دست‌کند کوگان است که در بررسی شواهد موجود و ارتباط آن با قلعهٔ بالادست آن به قرون میانهٔ اسلامی تاریخ‌گذاری گردید. درنهایت، به‌نظر می‌رسد غنای فرهنگی منطقه، علاوه‌بر پتانسیل بالای زیست‌محیطی، بازتابی از جایگاه ارتباطی آن به‌عنوان کوتاه‌ترین راه ارتباطی خوزستان با درهٔ خرم‌آباد و لرستان است.

کلیدواژگان: لرستان، پلدختر، بررسی باستان‌شناسی، دهستان میان‌کوه شرقی، دهستان میان‌کوه غربی.

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