

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS IN NORTHWESTERN FARs, IRAN

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After more than a decade of inertia in domestic and foreign archaeological activities in Iran following the 1978 revolution, recent years have witnessed the begin-

ning of a new era favorable for the systematic resumption of such activities under the leadership of Mr. Serajaddin Kazerouni, the Director of the Cultural Heritage Organization, and his deputies, Mr. Jalil Golshan and Mr. Naser Chegini.

Thanks to Mr. Kazerouni's encouragement and support, I was able to conduct my proposed ethnoarchaeological survey in Fars (fig. 1). The permit for the survey came in early March 1995, too late to apply for any grant. I am particularly grateful to Professor William Sumner who encouraged me and enabled me to start the project by providing me with a small fund, which was supplemented by my own resources.

The province of Fars, the homeland of the Persian Achaemenids, is archaeologically one of the richest regions in Iran. Fars has been populated since the Middle Palaeolithic. Although the evidence for the Early post-Pleistocene occupation of Fars is meager, and the processes of the initial development of agriculture and animal husbandry are not particularly well-known, our knowledge about the development of complex societies and the rise of early states there is comparatively superior to a number of other regions in Iran.

My research design involved the study of a mobile pastoralist tribe (Dareshori) of the Qashqaii confederation, and an archaeological survey of the valleys through which the Qashqaii migrate to and from their winter/summer pastures. I was seeking to find answers to a number of questions I raised in my doctoral thesis and in an article (*Iran* 26 1988:17–34) concerning: (a) the historical development and characteristics of the settlement patterns in the valleys to the northwest of Marv Dasht; (b) the possible correspondence between the geographical extension of Bakun culture and the traditional territories of the mobile pastoralists (in this case the Qashqaii); (c) the role of prehistoric mobile pastoralists in the development of complex society; and (d) an understanding of the material correlates of behavior of the mobile pastoralists in their environment so that their presence could be detected archaeologically in future excavations in the region.

After I made preparations in Tehran and coordinated my plans with numerous offices in charge of tribal affairs, I departed to Shiraz with Mr. Tahmoureth Qasemi (a former nomad and a graduate student of archaeology) as my assistant. After spending two weeks in Shiraz and in Mahur-Milati, near Nourabad Mamasani, the winter pasture of the Dareshori tribes of the Qashqaii, we realized that due to an unusual cool and wet spell the tribes had decided to postpone their departure to their summer pasture for a month. Limitation of time and money forced us to abandon the ethnological part of the project, hoping that in the near future we would be back in the field to resume our research.

We began our archaeological survey on May 1, 1995. We were accompanied by Dr. Mahmud Mir-Eskandari, an Iranian Government representative; Mr. Mehrdad Malekzadeh, staff member of the Cultural Heritage Organization; Mr. Saiid Safarzadeh and Mr. Nourozi, representatives of Fars Cultural Heritage Organization; and Mr. Ghaza Heidari, staff member of the Persepolis Project. These individuals were instrumental in the success of the expedition and I am grateful to them for their help.

As mentioned before, our project was also designed to answer a number of questions concerning the geographical extent and settlement patterns of Bakun culture in Fars during the fifth and early fourth millennia B.C. The area we chose to investigate lies to the northwest of the Marv Dasht Plain, which had already been surveyed some twenty-five years ago by William Sumner. Although the southern parts of the survey area overlapped with the region Sumner covered in his survey, the

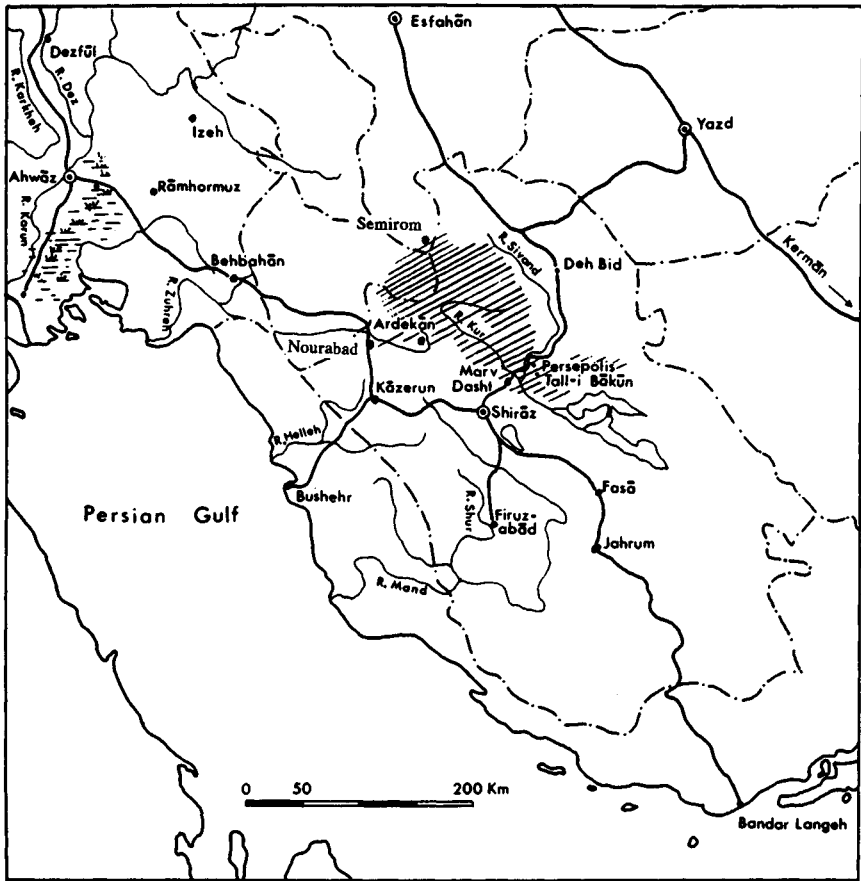


Figure 1. Map indicating limits of survey area in northwestern Fars, Iran

northern parts had not been surveyed. The region to the northwest of Marv Dasht consists of a number of parallel valleys that lead to the inner Zagros Mountains through Semirom, the boundary between the Qashqaii and the Bakhtyari. The width of these valleys is different, ranging from less than a kilometer to over ten kilometers. They are also different in the quality and quantity of natural resources, including spring water, freshwater rivers, firewood, arable land, and so on. On the whole, narrower valleys have fewer modern villages and ancient sites. In the large intermontane valleys, both modern villages and ancient sites tend to be situated on the slopes of the mountains. Dasht-e Bakan (some one hundred and twenty kilometers to the northwest of Marv Dasht), which was still inundated by the spring rains, clearly demonstrated the reason for this spatial distribution of both ancient and modern sites.

In the course of our survey, we discovered seventy-seven sites, ranging in date from the early Neolithic to the Saljuq periods. Most of the sites were small ranging from 0.5 to 2.0–3.0 hectares; but larger sites and smaller ones did exist. After a day of work it became quickly apparent that in addition to the forces of natural elements, sites' measurements have been heavily affected by local farmers. Most of the sites have been terribly destroyed for fertilizer—the soil of the cultivated lands surrounding the mounds was almost always mixed with potsherds. There were even small

fertile valleys inhabited by a number of modern villages but with no visible sign of ancient mounds. But only a walk across the cultivated fields with scattered potsherds would reveal the remnants of the mounds that once existed in such valleys. Therefore, the statistics that our survey produced do not, of course, represent the actual settlement pattern and population density in the region.

I have argued elsewhere that Tall-e Bakun A was a late prehistoric administrative center that controlled the manufacture and distribution of goods in Marv Dasht. Initially, I was hoping to find in these valleys a fifth millennium site that resembled Tall-e Bakun A and which was comparatively large enough and centrally located to provide answers to some of our questions. Such a site unfortunately was not discovered during the survey.

On my initial visit to Nourabad Mamasani, northwest of Shiraz, I visited a mound that seemed to be very promising for finding answers to some of our questions, particularly those concerning the transition from the late prehistoric to the complex urban societies of the late fourth millennium B.C. After we had finished our survey in the northwestern valleys of Fars, we returned to Nourabad to conduct a survey of this mound (locally called Tall-e Nourabad) and its satellite mounds.

Tall-e Nourabad rises to about twenty meters above the surrounding plain with an area of about ten hectares. The mound is situated in the middle of the fertile Dasht-e Nourabad, the heartland of the winter pastures of the mobile pastoralists of the region. It is surrounded by a number of smaller sites, the spatial distribution of which reveals a coarse hexagonal pattern. The modern town of Nourabad, connected to the tell from the northeast, itself has a similar network of dependent loci. Tall-e Nourabad was occupied during the Bakun B1 period or earlier, and judging by its size, continued to be the occupational center of the plain from late prehistoric through the Lapui, Protoliterate, and Kaftari periods, a crucial time-span of ca. 2,000 years during which early state formation and urbanism took place. These characteristics make the site an ideal place to investigate with the hope of answering a number of questions that our research has raised.

Before I departed from Iran, Mr. Kazerouni encouraged me to write a proposal for a joint project with the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization to conduct survey and excavations at Nourabad. I have submitted the proposal and am told a decision will be made some time in late summer.
