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Landscapes, Scriptures, Symbols and Architectures of Ancient Iran

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Introducción

El antiguo Irán, Persia, pero también Elam, constituye un ámbito de estudio apasionante del que cada vez tenemos más información. El número vigésimo sexto de nuestra revista hace un repaso por distintos aspectos que son objeto de investigación en la actualidad, y lo hace de la mano de investigadores iraníes, franceses, italianos y españoles.

Solemos recordar que la inscripción de Darío en Behistun fue la llave a partir de la cual se pudo descifrar el cuneiforme. La inscripción estaba escrita en persa antiguo, en babilonio y en elamita. A partir del persa se pudo comenzar a descifrar el babilonio, y el elamita tardaría algo más. Es muy interesante que la inscripción estuviese escrita en la lengua originaria de la zona, y que los aqueménidas lo reconociesen con su inscripción como tal. Visiones exógenas y posteriores no siempre han querido ver esta vinculación.

El trabajo de Silva Balatti sobre materiales inscritos del Irán aqueménida continúa una línea de trabajos sobre la escritura irania que aún hoy nos da alegrías y resultados interesantísimos.

La arquitectura irania es objeto de varios artículos en este volumen. El de Davide Solaris y Roberto Dan sobre el significado y la arqueología de Masjed-e Soleyman, reinterpretando su origen y su contexto socio-cultural, es el primero de ellos. El trasvase cultural que estudia Pierfrancesco Callieri de parte de babilonios en Persépolis nos habla de arquitectura, pero también de arqueología y de la información que obtenemos de ellas.

Carlos Fernández Rodríguez aborda la gestión del agua y de su papel en la habitabilidad en el sur de Irán durante la Edad del Hierro, que debe relacionarse con lo que sucede al otro lado del Golfo. Fernando Escribano Martín indaga en lo que conocemos como “jardín persa”, en sus orígenes y en cómo ha evolucionado, y para eso debe partir de Pasargada en Persia, pero ir también más atrás para comprenderlo.

Sébastien Gondet aborda el desarrollo de la agricultura y la historia de la ocupación de la Persépolis aqueménida, aspecto clave para entender el funcionamiento de la capital persa, y Alireza Khounani los viñedos de la Nisa arsácida parta, un ejemplo concreto de agricultura y de comercio en otro periodo clave de la historia irania.

El ámbito material viene tratado con el trabajo de Giulio Maresca sobre la cerámica de Sistán en la Edad del Hierro, o el estudio más específico de Negin Meri sobre una bulla concreta conservada en una institución museística de Teherán.

Cerramos esta temática tan variada e interesante que hemos ido tratando de agrupar en esta introducción con el trabajo de Zahara Gharenkhani, en el que realiza unas reflexiones sobre criaturas híbridas de la Persia preislámica y recapacita sobre su simbolismo, que va mucho más allá del tiempo en el que fueron concebidas.

La panoplia de estudios de diverso orden que aquí presentamos da cuenta del rico mundo que se está investigando en torno al Irán antiguo, cuyas manifestaciones elamita y persa, cada vez más claramente vinculadas, trascendieron también en el tiempo y en el espacio.

F. Escribano Martín, C. del Cerro Linares, C. Fernández Rodríguez y F. L. Borrego Gallardo

Foreword

Ancient Iran, Persia, and Elam constitute a fascinating field of study about which we have more and more information. The 26th issue of our journal allows a revision through several aspects of the current research along with Iranian, French, Italian and Spanish scholars.

We usually remember that cuneiform was deciphered thanks to the Darius' inscription in Behistun. It was written in Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite. From Persian, it was possible to start deciphering the Babylonian, even if the Elamite took more time. It is indeed very interesting that the inscription was written in the native language of the region, and that Achaemenids recognised it. Some outside and later views have not understood this correlation.

The study of Silvia Balatti about written materials of Achaemenid Iran continues a line of research about the Iranian writing system that even today provides very interesting results.

The Iranian Architecture is the aim of some papers in this issue. The first one is the contribution of Davide Solaris and Roberto Dan about the signification and the archaeology of Masjed-e Soleyman, reinterpreting its origin and socio-cultural context. In the same way, the cultural transfer on behalf of Babylonians in Persepolis analysed by Pierfrancesco Callieri is related to architecture but also to Archaeology and to the information that we obtain from them.

Carlos Fernández Rodríguez explores water management and its function in the habitability of Southern Iran during the Iron Age, showing that it is to the situation on the other side of the Gulf. Fernando Escribano Martín investigates what we know as the 'Persian garden', as well as its origins and development. To do this, he should start from Pasargadae in Persia, but also from more ancient times.

Sébastien Gondet analyses agriculture's development and history of the Achaemenid Persepolis' occupation, which is a key aspect for understanding the functioning of this Persian capital. On the other hand, Alireza Khounani presents the vineyards of the Arsacid-Partian Nisa, a concrete example of agriculture and trade in another important period of Iranian history.

In terms of material culture, Giulio Maresca presented a paper about the Sistan pottery in the Iron Age, and Negin Meri developed specific research of an example of a bulla kept in a Museum of Teheran.

We close this wide ranging and interesting theme that we group in this foreword with the studies of Zahara Gharenkhani reflects on some hybrid creatures of the Pre-Islamic Persia, reconsidering their symbolism, which goes beyond the time when they were conceived.

The array of studies of different kind that we present in this issue accounts for the rich world that is under investigation around Ancient Iran, whose Elamite and Persian manifestations, progressively more related, transcend both in time and space.

F. Escribano Martín, C. del Cerro Linares, C. Fernández Rodríguez and F. L. Borrego Gallardo

AN OVERVIEW OF THE POTTERY FROM SISTAN IN THE LATE IRON AGE/ACHAEMENID PERIOD

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(Sapienza University of Rome)

ABSTRACT

The paper analyses some archaeological issues related to pottery production in Sistan —between south-eastern Iran and south-western Afghanistan— in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period. Hallmarks of cultural development at the local level and interactions with neighbouring areas are overviewed in the light of published pottery assemblages from the region.

KEYWORDS

Sistan, Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period, Pottery.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analizan algunas cuestiones arqueológicas relacionadas con la producción de cerámica en Sistán —entre el sureste de Irán y el suroeste de Afganistán— en Edad del Hierro Reciente/ periodo Aqueménida. A la luz de los conjuntos cerámicos publicados de la región, se examinan los rasgos distintivos del desarrollo cultural a escala local y las interacciones con las zonas vecinas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sistán, Edad del Hierro Reciente/periodo Aqueménida, cerámica.

1. Geographical and historical context

The large region of Sistan is located between south-eastern Iran and south-western Afghanistan¹. In terms of physical geography, the Iranian portion of Sistan represents the westernmost sector —encompassed within the political boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran— of the wetlands surrounding Lake Hamun², whose eastern portion mainly falls within the limits of the Nimruz Province of Afghanistan. The Hamun lacustrine basin, in turn, constitutes the terminal part of a wider endorheic hydrographic system (Fig. 1), named Sistan Basin or Hilmand Basin (after its main tributary river)³ and stretching for

¹ I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Editorial Board of the *ISIMU* Journal for their kind invitation to participate in this 26th monographic volume with a contribution dealing with aspects of my research activities on ancient Iran. The present paper relies on some earlier scientific articles dealing with the pottery from the area of Sistan in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period (Maresca 2010; 2019a; 2019b), which I wrote after I obtained my PhD at L’Orientale University of Naples (2008) and as a post-doctoral Research Fellow at that same University (2016-2020). At that time I was a member of a research programme (coordinated by Bruno Genito) aimed at publishing data from the 1960s and 1970s Italian archaeological activities at Dahane-ye Gholaman. Although my involvement in the latter publication project came to a halt in June 2020, research on the archaeology of pottery production in ancient Sistan still represents one of my current scientific interests as Assistant Professor of Iranian Archaeology at Sapienza University of Rome. A preliminary version of this paper was read at the international “Achaemenid Pottery Workshop” held on December 2021 in Istanbul in the frame of the Priority programme of the German Research Foundation “The Iranian highlands: resiliencies and integration in pre-modern societies” (DFG-SPP 2176). Feedbacks and comments kindly received from the participants in the latter workshop stimulated several further thoughts, which are here expressed.

² Toponyms, hydronyms and oronyms are reported according to the variants more commonly used in the international scientific jargon.

³ Scholarly literature on the physical geography of Sistan and the lower Helmand Basin is remarkably vast; the scientific contributions by Jux and Kempf (1983) and Whithney (2006) can be mentioned among the most relevant ones in that respect.

roughly 400×200 kilometres from south-western Afghanistan to south-eastern Iran (Jux and Kempf 1983: 7)⁴.

The basin is delimited by a series of remarkable mountain chains —the Hindu Kush at north, the Suleiman Range at east, the Baluchestan and the Makran mountain ranges at south, the East Iranian Ranges at west (Jux and Kempf 1983: 7 and fig.1; Whitney 2006: 5)— while its lowest area (around 463 metres AMSL) is the *playa* of Gaud-i Zirreh in Afghanistan (Whitney 2006: 6).

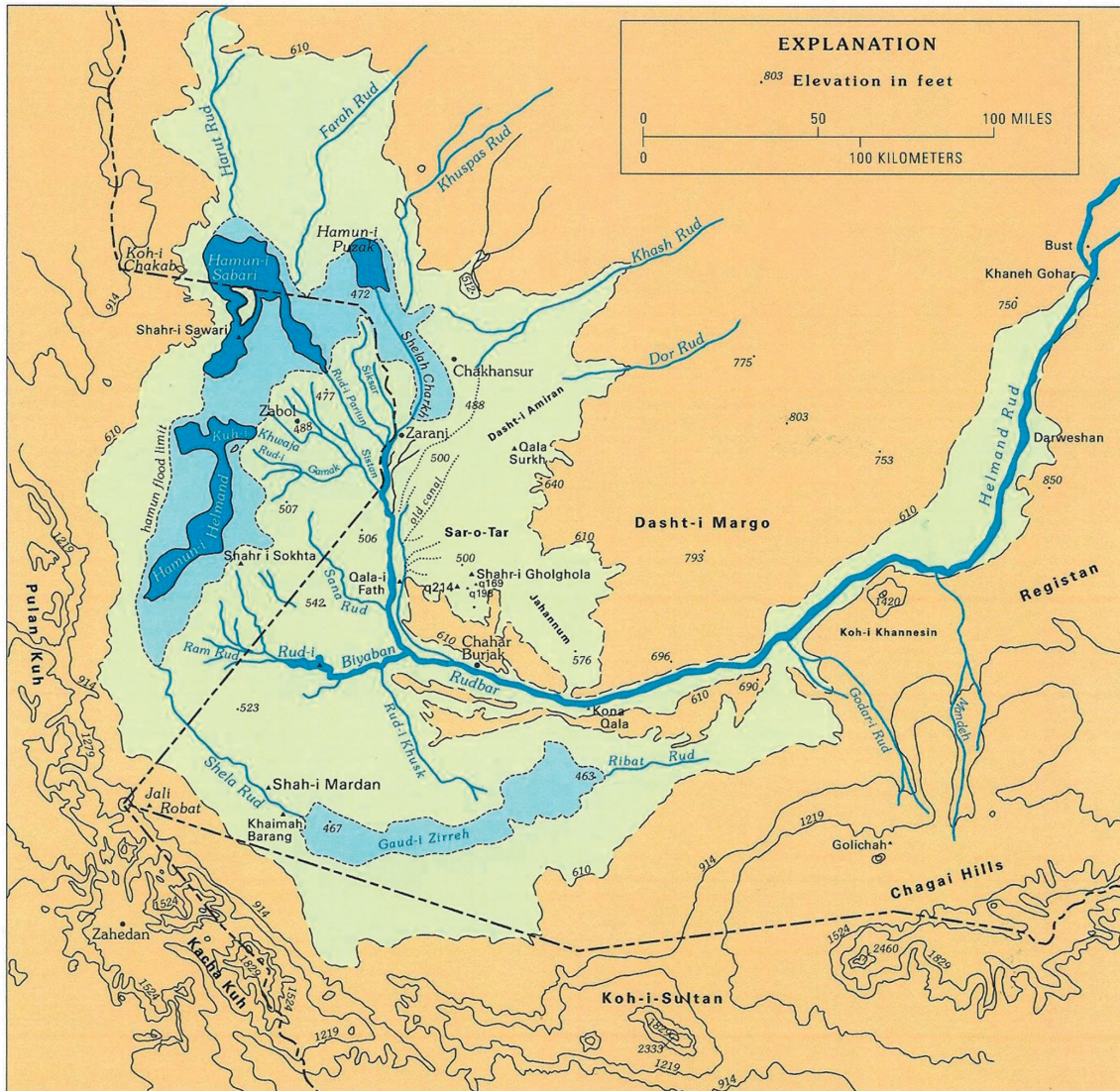


Fig. 1. Map showing the geographical features in the area of Sistan and the lower Helmand Valley (after Whitney 2006: fig. 2).

⁴ The “depression containing the large delta of the Helmand River and a series of shallow, semiconnected playas at the western edge of the basin” (Whitney 2006: 2) is commonly considered as “Sistan” proper, while the south-eastern sandy region on the Sistan/Hilmand Basin is instead known as Registan (Whitney 2006: fig. 1; Jux and Kempf 1983: fig. 1); the two regions “[...] are fairly well divided by the course of the Hilmand River. Seemingly endless and impassable dune fields rise from 750 m. to more than 1200 m. a.s.l. in Registān. Whereas in Sistān gravel plains imperceptibly slope downwards from north to south to a depth of 500 m. a.s.l., where lakes occur at the foot of high escarpments” (Jux and Kempf 1983: 7).

The fragile ecological balance of the aforesaid inland basin mostly depends on the hydrology of the Helmand River, acting as “*the ‘life-line’ of the Sistan Basin*” (Fairservis 1961: 13)⁵. Besides the Helmand, further three main rivers discharge their water into the lacustrine system, i.e. the Khash Rud, the Farah Rud and the Harut Rud (Fig. 1), all receiving their water from spring precipitation and snowmelt on the Hindu Kush (Jux and Kempf 1983: 9-10). Therefore, mid/late spring is usually the period when the most relevant amount of water reaches the terminal sector of the Sistan Basin, feeding Lake Hamun at its largest extent —approximately 3000 square kilometres (Ehlers 2003: 646)— and even overflowing southwards, through the Shelagh River, into the Gaud-i Zirreh. Conversely, in the dry season, the surface of Lake Hamun dramatically shrinks and three smaller and separate bodies of water can be differentiated: Hamun-e Helmand, Hamun-e Saberi and Hamun-e Puzak (Jux and Kempf 1983: 10; Fig. 1).

During the course of history, the geographical peculiarities of Sistan and its fragile environment deeply influenced cultural phenomena in the area⁶.

Territories around Lake Hamun and the lower course of the Helmand River entered written history when they were mentioned in the Bisotun inscription of King Darius I. In the Old Persian version of the latter inscription (DB/OP I, 16), the name of that country and its inhabitants was reported in a form to be read as “*Zranka*”, a *dahyu-* always mentioned in all the “list of countries/people” subjected to the authority of the Achaemenid kings (Maresca 2019a: 123-128). Relying on the toponyms attested in Greek and Latin sources to indicate the region named as *Zranka* in the Old Persian inscriptions (Schmitt 1996: 535), the territory at the issue is scholarly termed as “Drangiana” as far as the periods of Achaemenid, Macedonian and Seleucid rules are concerned. It is not an easy task to establish with a good degree of certainty the overall extent of such a territorial, administrative and cultural unit; however, at the time of the Achaemenid Persian empire, *Zranka/Drangiana* possibly stretched northwards as far as Farah, in Afghanistan (Maresca 2019a: 127), and was bordered by Aria on the north, Arachosia on the east, Gedrosia on the south and Carmania on the west (Schmitt 1996: 536).

2. Pottery from Afghan Sistan in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period

In an earlier paper, I briefly discussed the limited pottery evidence from archaeological activities carried out in territories likely pertaining to *Zranka* in Afghanistan (Maresca 2019a: 128-135). The archaeological evidence from the Afghan portion of Sistan and the lower Helmand Basin in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period⁷ was also synthesised in a recent and comprehensive monograph on the archaeology of that Country (Ball et al. 2019: 276-278)⁸.

⁵ With a total length of approximately 1300 kilometres, the Helmand River has its headwaters in the Koh-i Baba Range west of Kabul; it then flows south-westwards through the Hazarajat mountainous region (Whithney 2006: 5) and the Afghan provinces of Wardak, Oruzgan, Helmand, Nimruz (therefore draining the entire south-western portion of Afghanistan) before it eventually empties into Lake Hamun, mostly located in Iranian territory (Hanifi 2004: 170). For a recent attempt to reconstruct the chronology of the Helmand channel alterations in Sistan see Karvigh 2022.

⁶ On the recent environmental, hydrological and, consequently, socio-economic crisis in the area, see especially UNEP 2006; Dehgan et al. 2014; Akbari *et al.* 2022.

⁷ Following the remarks by Boucharlat (2005: 270-271), who warned against the generic utilisation of the term “Achaemenid” in archaeology and suggested to limit its use “*non seulement aux documents assurément datable entre 559 et 300 mais à ceux qui dénotent un réel impact du pouvoir royal, c’est-à-dire qui ressortissent à des productions impériales et sont identifiables comme tels*”, the alternative expressions “Late Iron Age” or “Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period” are adopted in the present paper.

⁸ For a recent and comprehensive overview on the history of archaeological research in Afghan Sistan see also Trousedale and Allen 2022: 19-26.

At the present stage of our knowledge about the Late Iron Age pottery from Afghan Sistan, the Sorkh Dagh mound at the site of Nad-i Ali seems to represent our main source for information, despite its debated chronology (Maresca 2019a: 128-133). Located at about 6 kilometres north of modern Zaranj, in the Nimruz Province (Fig. 2), the Sorkh Dagh (“Red Mound”) at Nad-i Ali was investigated by the *Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan* in 1936, when Roman Ghirshman excavated a test trench on the western side of the mound. Several structures were brought to light and ascribed to two chronological horizons: *Période I*, the most recent phase, was dated to the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period, while *Période II*—with its structures built atop a huge mud-brick terraced platform—was assigned to an earlier date, around the 8th century BCE (Ghirshman 1939).

In the early 1950s, large-scale survey activities carried out in Afghan Sistan by the Anthropology Department of the American Museum in New York substantially confirmed the chronology of the Sorkh Dagh previously suggested by Ghirshman (Fairservis 1961: 45-46). In 1968, conversely, further excavations at the same site by a team from the University of Pennsylvania established a somewhat different chronology, ranging from the 8th-7th century BCE to the Hellenistic-Parthian period (Dales 1977). In the mid-1990s, however, the chronology of the Sorkh Dagh was radically questioned by Roland Besenval and Henri-Paul Francfort (1994). Relying on observations about the pottery assemblage from the site and its architectural features—especially the size of the bricks and the overall dimensions of the platform—the two French scholars concluded that the massive mud-brick platform at the Sorkh Dagh was apparently “constructed before or during the period from 2300-1700, in connection with the Bactro-Margiana Bronze Age or Oxus Civilization” (Besenval and Francfort 1994: 5).

Nonetheless, several pottery fragments from excavation or survey activities at the Sorkh Dagh of Nad-i Ali display evident morpho-typological analogies (see e.g. Dales 1977: 93-101) with pottery vessels from the Late Iron Age site of Dahane-ye Gholaman, in Iranian Sistan⁹. Moreover, parallels for a peculiar geometric motif incised on two potsherds from Ghirshman’s *Période II* (Ghirshman 1939: pl. IV, N.A. 55 and N.A. 70) are only known from the latter site (see below).

Evidence of Late Iron Age pottery in Afghan Sistan, however, is not limited to the assemblage from the Sorkh Dagh at Nad-i Ali. In 1966, a British archaeological mission surveyed the middle and lower Helmand valley—from the site of Qala-i Bust, south of Lashkargah, near the confluence of the Helmand and Arghandab rivers, to Bandar-i Kamal Khan, around Chahar Borjak (Hammond 1970: fig. 1)—and recovered twenty-two Late Iron Age pottery fragments from the surface of eight sites in the area (Hammond 1970: figs. 2 and 4), unfortunately without providing any photographs or drawings of those materials¹⁰. Only two of the aforementioned eight sites were located in the Nimruz Province (Fig. 2): the name of the first one was reported as Zango/Sangar (Hammond 1970: 450 no. 25)¹¹, while the second un-named mound (Hammond 1970: 450 no. 29) was later identified as Baghak/Pusht-i Gau (Ball 2019: no. 77), on the left bank of the Helmand, at 5.5 kilometres from Rudbar. The remaining six sites were instead located more upstream, in the Helmand Province (Fig. 2): Zindan (Hammond 1970: 449 no. 6)¹², Gurgak (Hammond 1970: 449 no. 9)¹³, Khwaja Hasan

⁹ See also the additional remarks by Vogelsang (1992: 264-266) and Ball et al. (2019: 277).

¹⁰ The fragments at the issue were simply described as follows: “[...] oxidized in firing to a hard red. The fabric contains small white mineral inclusions and averages 4.5 mm. in thickness. Some sherds have a red slip slightly deeper in colour than the fabric, and some have dark parallel burnished lines. The only vessel types present are small bowls and perhaps a small flask” (Hammond 1970: 451).

¹¹ See also Ball 2019: no. 1252.

¹² See also Ball 2019: no. 1260.

¹³ See also Ball 2019: no. 396.

(Hammond 1970: 449 no. 14)¹⁴ and Darwish Anrar Khan Qal'a (Hammond 1970: 449 no. 18)¹⁵; two un-named mounds in the same area (Hammond 1970: 450 nos. 37 and 38) were later identified as Banadir Jum'a Khan (Ball 2019: no. 101) and Malakhana (Ball 2019: no. 701) respectively.

The recent publication of a monograph about the sites surveyed and excavated in the frame of the “Helmand-Sistan Project” —a long-term archaeological project on Afghan Sistan and the lower Helmand Valley sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and active on the field in the 1970s, under the scientific direction of William B. Trousdale— has remarkably increased our archaeological knowledge of that region (Trousdale and Allen 2022). While waiting for the publication of the second volume of that book for an in-depth and specific discussion about the large assemblage of pottery finds from those archaeological activities (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 9), it is noteworthy that “*Achaemenid wares*”¹⁶ are reported from ten sites in the researched area (Fig. 2)¹⁷.

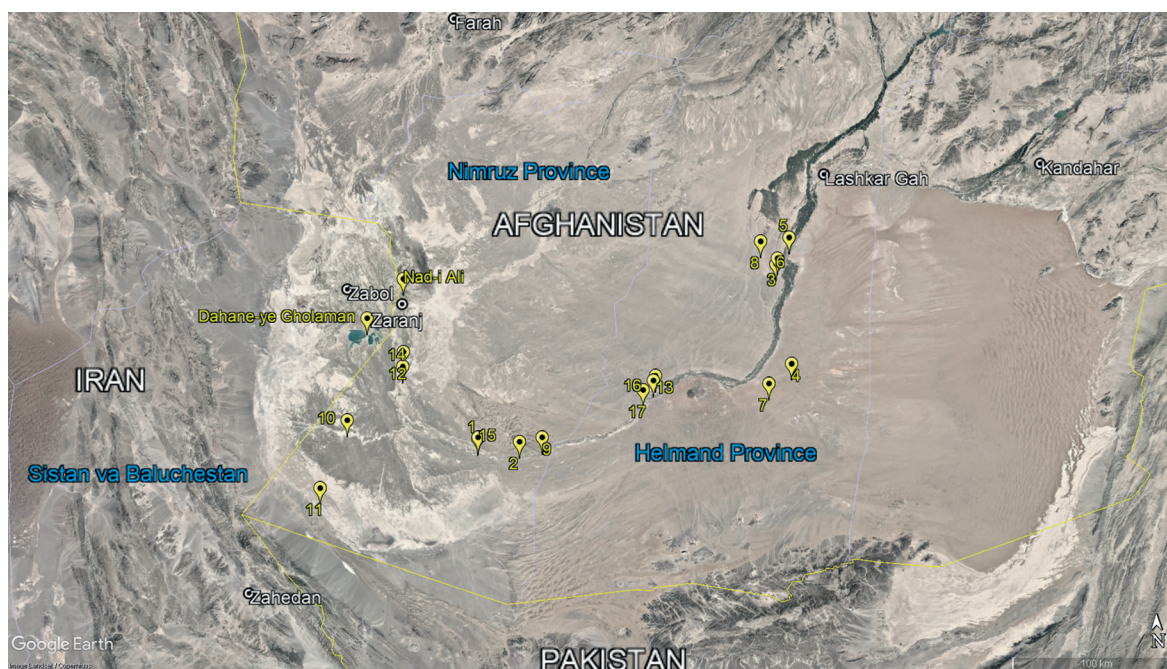


Fig. 2. Map showing the location of the main modern cities and archaeological sites mentioned in the text. Key: no. 1: Zango/Sangar; no. 2: Baghak/Pusht-i Gau; no. 3: Zindan; no. 4: Gurgak; no. 5: Khwaja Hasan; no. 6: Darwish Anrar Khan Qal'a; no. 7: Banadir Jum'a Khan; no. 8: Malakhana; no. 9: Lat Qala; no. 10: Gina Kuhna; no. 11: Gudar-i Shah; no. 12: Jui Nau; no. 13: Malakhan Plain VI; no. 14: Qala-i Fath; no. 15: Qala-i Madar-i Padshah III; no. 16: Qala-i Sirak; no. 17: Tepe Daishu II. Satellite view after Google Earth™.

¹⁴ See also Ball 2019: no. 595.

¹⁵ See also Ball 2019: no. 253.

¹⁶ These are preliminarily described as being characterised by “*buff wares and light colored slips*” and mainly represented by “*sharply carinated tulip bowls*” and “*ridged basins and jars*” (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 43).

¹⁷ W. B. Trousdale and M. Allen had already provided some preliminary information in a paper entitled “Afghan Sistan in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic Periods”, read on 10th December 2020 at the International Virtual Event of Archaeology, organised at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan in Zahedan, Iran (<https://seminars.usb.ac.ir/asrc/en-us/Page3314/>; accessed July 2023). A poster on the same subject was also presented by the aforesaid scholars at the ASOR - American Society of Overseas Research 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting (https://www.asor.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-Poster-Abstract-Book_updated-11-2-20.pdf; accessed July 2023).

Indeed, pottery fragments possibly pertaining to the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period were brought to light during excavations at Lat Qala (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 433-449)¹⁸ and were also collected at Gina Kuhna (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 335)¹⁹, Godar-i Shah/Godar-i Shah (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 336-341)²⁰, Jui Nau (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 239-241)²¹, Khwaja Hasan (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 245-246)²², Malakhan Plain VI (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 260)²³, Qala-i Fath (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 275-279)²⁴, Qala-i Madar-i Padshah III (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 284-285)²⁵, Qala-i Sirak (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 287-313)²⁶ and Tepe Daishu II (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 325)²⁷. Conversely, possibly Late Iron Age potsherds were not encountered at the site of Bagak/Pusht-i Gao (Trousdale and Allen 2022: 223-224), where the British survey of the mid-1960s had previously documented pottery evidence of that period (Hammond 1970: 450 no. 29; Ball 2019: no. 77).

The reappraisal of the data from the 1970s Helmand-Sistan Project also led to the remarkable publication of a distinctive —and previously unknown— class of Early Iron Age painted pottery in the Sar-o-Tar area of the Nimruz Province (Fig. 1), frequently found in association with platform-based settlements along large canals (Allen and Trousdale 2019)²⁸.

3. Pottery from Iranian Sistan in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid Period

The archaeological site of Dahane-ye Gholaman (Fig. 2), located at about 30 kilometres south-east of Zabul, in the vicinity of the village of Qal'a-ye Now, surely represent the most important source of information about the pottery from Iranian Sistan in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period. The site was discovered in 1960 by Umberto Scerrato during Italian archaeological activities sponsored by the IsMEO (Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente) and was soon considered as a complex of buildings of the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period (Scerrato 1962). Between 1962-1965 and 1975, IsMEO excavations brought to light (completely or partially) seven buildings —QN2, QN3, QN4, QN5, QN6, QN7 and QN16— among the twenty-eight ones detected at the site, interpreted as the capital city of ancient *Zranka/Drangiana*²⁹.

¹⁸ See also Ball 2019: no. 687.

¹⁹ See also Ball 2019: no. 376.

²⁰ See also Ball 2019: no. 383.

²¹ See also Ball 2019: no. 479.

²² See also Ball 2019: no. 595. Hammond had apparently collected some Late Iron Age pottery fragments at the same site (Hammond 1970: 449 no. 14). Late Iron Age potsherds were not observed, instead, when the site was surveyed in 2011 (Central Helmand Archaeological Study/CHAS no. 14), in the frame of archaeological activities supported by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with the aim to assess site looting and damages to the archaeological heritage in the area between Lashkar Gah and Khan Neshin (Abramiuk 2017; 2019).

²³ See also Ball 2019: no. 700.

²⁴ See also Ball 2019: no. 842.

²⁵ See also Ball 2019: no. 863. The British archaeological mission had surveyed the site in 1966, without reporting the presence of pottery fragments possibly pertaining to the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period (Hammond 1970: no. 20).

²⁶ See also Ball 2019: no. 881.

²⁷ See also Ball 2019: no. 224. With the exception of Khwaja Hasan, Malakhan Plain VI, Qala-i Sirak and Tepe Daishu II (all located in the Hilmand Province), the remaining six archaeological sites are located in the Nimruz Province of Afghanistan (Trousdale and Allen 2022: Appendix Figure 1.4).

²⁸ Conversely, a wide archaeological “gap” is attested for the Early Iron Age in Iranian Sistan. The latter circumstance could be related to radical climatic changes at the end of the Bronze Age, which may have significantly affected cultural dynamics in the area and shifted the Early Iron Age settlement model to less tangible non-urbanised schemes. It could also be related to hydrological and geo-morphological processes that may have obliterated every archaeological trace from the centuries between the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Iron Age (Mortazavi 2007; Mortazavi et al. 2015; Maresca 2018: fn. 45).

²⁹ Among the several scientific contributions about the Italian archaeological activities at the site see especially Scerrato 1966a; 1966b; 1970; 1979; Genito 1986; *forthcoming*.

Preliminary information about the pottery from Dahane-ye Gholaman was given on the basis of the potsherds collected during the 1960 and 1961 surveys (Scerrato 1962: 188-189, figs. 13-16), while a more in-depth study was based on the assemblage from the first excavations carried out in 1962 and 1963 (Scerrato 1966b: 29-30, figs. 52-61). Further information about the pottery from the excavated buildings QN2 and QN4 was provided by Genito, who discussed some of the most frequent types of vessels at the site (Genito 1990; Fig. 3)³⁰.

A new season of excavations at Dahane-ye Gholaman was inaugurated on October 2000, under the direction of Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi, on behalf of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization (ICHO)/Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO)³¹. Several potsherds and entire vessels were published in the preliminary reports of those archaeological activities, mainly involving building QN15, but also concerning buildings QN1, QN17, QN21, QN22 and QN23 (Sajjadi 1380/2001: 53-73; Sajjadi and Saber Moghaddam 2004: fig. 5; Sajjadi 2007: figs. 11 and 12; Sajjadi and Zehbari 2018: figs. 5 and 6).

More recently, between 2008 and 2012, Kourosch Mohammadkhani (2012; 2014; 2018) carried out geophysical prospections and field walking surveys at the site by, on behalf of the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO). Pottery fragments were collected and counted within each surveyed square at the site on that occasion (Mohammadkhani 2014: fig. 5-3, tabs. 50 and 51).

A remarkable number of scholarly publications devoted to the pottery from the excavations carried out at Dahane-ye Gholaman was published in the last lustres, independently from new field activities at the site³².

In the frame of my past research activities at “L’Orientale” University of Naples under the scientific supervision of Bruno Genito, I had the opportunity to analyse an assemblage of over three-thousands pottery fragments from Dahane-ye Gholaman, transferred to Italy at the time of the 1960s-1970s excavations, in the light of agreements between the IsMEO and Iranian Authorities. Eleven different pottery fabrics were singled out in that assemblage and a preliminary classification of the main vessel types associated with each fabric was given (Maresca 2010; 2019b: 255-259). The degree of morphological and functional specialization of the eleven aforementioned fabrics turned out to be quite low—with the exception of fabric DG2, exclusively associated with cooking pots (Maresca 2010: 427, fig. 4; 2019b: 257, fig. 7a)—pointing to a remarkable level of standardization in the pottery manufacturing processes.

Roughly in the same period, a team of Iranian archaeologists focused on the pottery assemblage from the Iranian excavations at Dahane-ye Gholaman as well as on the pottery fragments from the IsMEO excavations at the site still stored in Iran (Mehrafarin et al. 1392/2013; Zehbari and Mehrafarin 1393/2014; Zehbari et al. 1393/2014; 2015; 1393/2015). Their most significant contribution is probably represented by an article on the “*structural characteristics*” of the pottery from the site, accompanied by a remarkable catalogue of 152 significant ceramic fragments (classified into eight groups according to the colour of their external surfaces and on the basis of morphological criteria), listing an extremely rich series of proposed morpho-typological parallels (Zehbari et al. 2015).

³⁰ Listed as “*cylindrical-conical beakers*”, “*carinated cups*”, “*truncated conical cups*”, “*oblique-sided cups*”, “*dishes*”, “*basins*”, “*jars with bulging body*”, “*jars with cylindrical body*”, “*ovoid jars*” and “*small jars*” (Genito 1990: 590-598).

³¹ Among the several scientific contributions about the Iranian archaeological activities at the site see especially Sajjadi 1380/2001; Sajjadi and Saber Moghaddam 2004; Sajjadi 2007; Sajjadi and Zehbari 2018.

³² Although excavations at Dahane-ye Gholaman came to a halt in 2006, the site, its archaeological and its architectural features still remain at the centre of a lively scientific debate, as demonstrated by some recently published papers (Genito 2018; Arab and Khaledian 2019; Davlatab *et al.* 2021; Mehrafarin 2021).

Very recently, moreover, studies on the pottery from Dahane-ye Gholaman were reviewed in the frame of an interesting paper about the pottery from the Iron IV Period in Eastern Iran (Cardini 2022: 578-580).

Relying on all the aforementioned works, it is possible to maintain that cylindro-conical beakers (Fig. 3a) can surely be considered among the most distinctive and frequently attested pottery vessels at the site. They were reported among the assemblage collected by Umberto Scerrato in 1960 and 1961 (Scerrato 1962: fig. 14 no. 23, fig. 15 nos. 7-10 and 13, fig. 16 no. 3) and were considered as the typical vessels of the site in the preliminary report about the 1962 and 1963 excavation campaigns (Scerrato 1966b: 27, figs. 54 and 58). The same opinion was also shared by Genito (1986: 295), who later stressed the remarkable morphological variability of the attested specimens (Genito 1990: 590, 592, figs. 1-3). Another relevant group of these beakers was found during Iranian excavations at building QN15 (Sajjadi 1380/2001: 52-58, groups A1-A5; Sajjadi 2004: 248; 2007: 143, figs. 11 and 12; Sajjadi and Saber Moghaddam 2004: 294, fig. 5; Sajjadi and Zehbari 2018: 406, 408, 411, fig. 6 nos. 22-33). Some examples were also reported among the materials collected on the surface of the site during the activities carried out by Kourosch Mohammadkhani (2014, fig. 5-3, tab. 51). Several other examples were listed in the catalogue by Zehbari et al. (2015, fig. 19 nos. 28 and 29; fig. 22 nos. 47-53; fig. 26 nos. 80-84; fig. 28 nos. 98 and 99; fig. 30 nos. 114-120, 124 and 125; fig. 31 nos. 130-132; fig. 32 nos. 141-144; fig. 33 no. 147). In a study specifically devoted to the vessels at the issue, the attested specimens from Dahane-ye Gholaman were assigned to seven groups and twenty-one sub-groups on the basis of morphological criteria (Zehbari et al. 1393/2015). The peculiar morphology of these beakers, seemingly unparalleled in the ceramic assemblages known from other sites of the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period in Iran and neighbouring areas, lead the authors to consider them as an original and typical vessel shape of Dahane-ye Gholaman (Zehbari et al. 1393/2015: 58), following the opinion previously maintained by Scerrato and Genito as well. Evidence for identical cylindro-conical beakers was nonetheless reported from several sites recently surveyed in southern Sistan and dated to the Late Iron Age (Alaeyi Moqaddam et al. 1395/2016; see below), thus outlining a completely new scenario concerning the distribution of this ceramic type in the area.

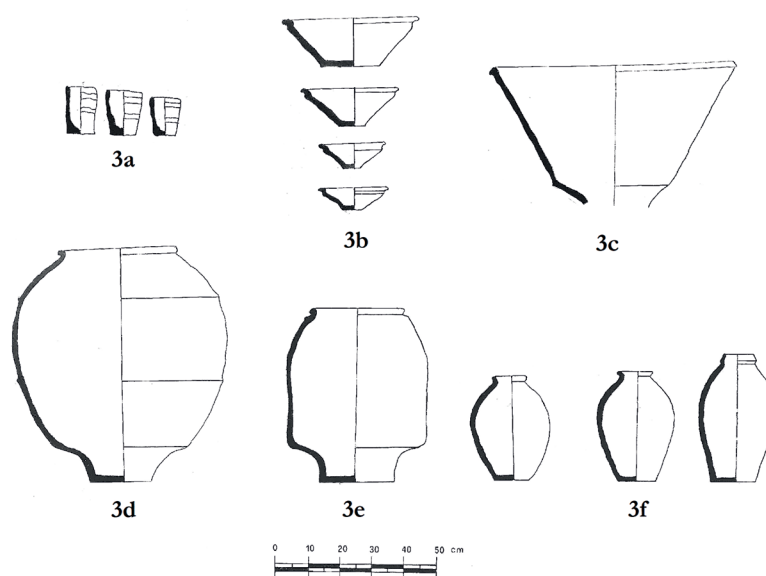


Fig. 3. An overview of the most frequently attested pottery vessels at Dahane-ye Gholaman. 3a: cylindro-conical beakers; 3b: carinated cups; 3c: large cone-truncated basin; 3d: large jar with globular profile and lower carination; 3e: large jar with cylindrical profile and lower carination; 3f: flat-bottomed oval-shaped jars (modified from Genito 1990: figs. 1 and 5).

Carinated bowls (Fig. 3b) are also frequently attested at Dahane-ye Gholaman. Scerrato stressed significant variations in the dimensions and in the shape of the rim of these bowls and was able to differentiate between bowls with a “simple” (Scerrato 1962: fig. 13 nos. 7-11, 13-15, fig. 15 no. 14) and “multiple careen” (Scerrato 1962: fig. 13 no. 12). Other examples of carinated bowls were published in the preliminary report of the 1962 and 1963 excavation campaigns at the site (Scerrato 1966b: figs. 52, 53, 58, 61). Several variants of this type of bowls were also documented by Genito, who listed a remarkable series of possible parallels from Iran and Afghanistan (Genito 1990: 592-593). Similar carinated bowls had already been considered among the characteristic pottery vessels on the Iranian Plateau in the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period, with some late diffusion also in Central Asia (Cattenat and Gardin 1977: fig. 6c-f). Indeed, similar vessels are mainly attested at Nad-i Ali and Old Kandahar. George F. Dales assigned comparable bowls from the former site to two different sub-groups belonging to the same type. While Type F-2 was represented by “*shallow bowl, thin walled with pronounced ledge rim*” (Dales 1977: 37, 52, pl. 19), Type F-6 included “*shallow to medium deep bowl with ledge rim and sharply crested multiple ridging below the rim*” (Dales 1977: 37, 56, pl. 21 nos. 2-5). A similar classification was also provided by Sven Helms for the pottery from the excavations at Old Kandahar. While bowls with simple carination comparable to the examples from Dahane-ye Gholaman were listed as “Genre 10” (Helms 1997: 39, fig. 55), bowls with multiple carination were instead classified as “Genre 12” (Helms 1997: 39, fig. 58).

Large basins (Fig. 3c) are very frequent among the pottery assemblage from Dahane-ye Gholaman and are mostly characterised by a moulded rim and a cone-truncated upper profile connected to a trumpet base by means of a lower sharp carination³³. Very few complete examples were published (Scerrato 1966b: fig. 60; Genito 1990: figs. 1a, 4a), comparable with similar vessels from Sogdiana or Bactriana (Scerrato 1966b: 30; Genito 1990: 594, fig. 4b-d).

As pointed out by Genito (1990: 595-598), three different types of jars are attested at Dahane-ye Gholaman (Fig. 3d-f). The first one is represented by large jars with a globular profile and lower carination (Scerrato 1962: fig. 16 no. 4; Scerrato 1966b: 27; Genito 1986: 303, tab. XXXVb; Genito 1990: 595, figs. 5a, 6a); the second type is represented by large vessels with cylindrical profile and lower carination (Genito 1986, 303, tab. XXXVa; 1990, 597, figs. 5b, 7a); the third and last type of jars attested at the site can be described as “*flat-bottomed oval-shaped jars*” (Scerrato 1966b: 27, figs. 56, 57, 59; Genito 1990: 598, fig. 5c) featuring several variations in their proportions and in the shape of their rims and neck. The first and second type of jars can be compared with similar vessels from Central Asia (Genito 1990: figs. 6b-h, 7b-e).

Several pottery fragments and vessels from Dahane-ye Gholaman are characterised by the presence of peculiar symbol incised on their wall (Fig. 4), representing an upside-down “trident” surmounted by a small circle (Scerrato 1966b: 27, fig. 58; Genito 1986: 295; Sajjadi and Moghaddam 2004: fig. 5; Sajjadi 1380/2001: 53 nos. 1-5; Sajjadi 2007: fig. 12; Maresca 2010: fig. 3 no. 54, fig. 6 nos. 7, 100 and 33; Zehbari et al. 2015: fig. 17 nos. 13 and 14, fig. 19 nos. 27-29, fig. 22 nos. 47-53 and 60, fig. 25 no. 74, fig. 26 nos. 80-84, fig. 30 nos. 114 and 119, fig. 32 nos. 141-142 and 144; Zehbari et al. 1393/2015: fig. 1, fig. 6 nos. 1-4 and 12, fig. 7 nos. 13-17; Sajjadi and Zehbari 2018, fig. 6 nos. 27, 29 and 30). Frequently interpreted as a potter’s mark, this peculiar incised symbol is also attested on a lid and on a jar from the Sorkh Dagh at Nad-i Ali (Ghirshman 1939: pl. IV, N.A. 55 and N.A. 70).

³³ This peculiar type of base, also attested in the case of several large jars, was probably conceived to firmly insert these large storage vessels into the ground.

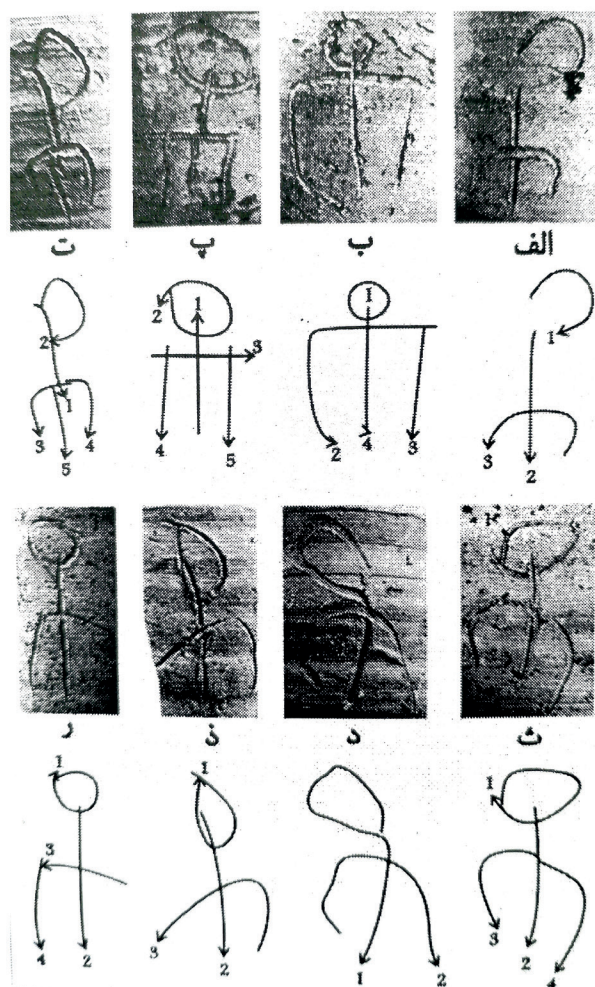


Fig. 4. Different attestations of the peculiar symbol frequently incised on pottery vessels from Dahane-ye Gholaman (after Zehbari 1397/2019: fig. 12).

Its presence on seal impressions found during the excavations at building QN15 (Sajjadi and Saber Moghaddam: 2004, fig. 8b; Sajjadi 2007: fig. 13; Sajjadi and Zehbari 2018: 411) possibly reveals that its real meaning and/or function is not properly interpreted yet (Zehbari 1397/2019).

Research about the pottery assemblage from Dahane-ye Gholaman has been furtherly enriched by publications specifically devoted to archaeometric issues. The prevalent utilisation of the same local raw materials in the ceramic production processes during historical phases in Sistan has been pointed out on the basis of several X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) and X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyses (Sarhaddi-Dadian et al. 2017; Pourzarghan et al. 2017). A rather evident continuity in the utilisation of similar and locally available raw materials for the ceramic production between the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid and later periods in Sistan was also highlighted by preliminary mineralogical and petrographic analyses carried out in Italy on samples of some pottery fabrics largely attested in the assemblage from Dahane-ye Gholaman and samples of the most frequently attested pottery fabrics from the nearby site of Qal'a-ye Sam (Maresca 2016, 204-205; Maresca 2019b: 261-263)³⁴.

³⁴ Further data from archaeometric analyses on ceramic samples from Dahane-ye Gholaman are going to be published in a monograph on the Italian excavations at the site (Genito *forthcoming*). Preliminary results, however, were reported by A. De Bonis in a presentation entitled "Petrographic Characterisation of Pottery

Evidence of Early Iron Age pottery from Iranian Sistan is not limited to Dahane-ye Gholaman anymore. More than one-hundred sites apparently dated to the Late Iron Age/Achaemenid Period were discovered in Southern Sistan during ICHHTO survey activities carried out between 2007 and 2010 (Mehrfarin 2016: 4, 8, fig. 2; Alaeyi Moqaddam et al. 2016: 118, figs. 1 and 5)³⁵. The presence of cylindro-conical beakers among the related pottery assemblage (Alaeyi Moqaddam et al. 2016, fig. 10) outlines an intriguing and completely new scenario for the distribution of those vessels in Sistan during the Late Iron Age.

4. Some conclusive remarks

Research about Late Iron Age pottery from Afghan and Iranian Sistan has shown that the so-called “tulip bowls” or “Achaemenid bowls” —a distinctive marker of the Achaemenid influence both in the heartland and at the edge of the Empire (Petrie et al. 2008)— seem to be basically absent in the area³⁶, where a more prominent role was instead played by carinated bowls with horizontal rim. Indeed, Achaemenid Drangiana was likely a transitional area/“*zone-charnière*” (together with Arachosia and Parthia) between the ceramic tradition of the Plateau and that of the adjacent north-eastern areas of Central Asia (Cattenat and Gardin 1977: 241). Conversely, “tulip bowls”/“Achaemenid bowls” are well documented in Sistan in later epochs (possibly in the Hellenistic period and without any doubt in the Parthian period), being especially attested at the site of Qal’a-ye Sam (see e.g. Maresca 2016: fig. 5 nos. 235 and 236).

An exception could nonetheless be represented by an alleged single attestation of a “tulip bowl” from Dahane-ye Gholaman (Zehbari et al. 2015: fig. 17 no. 10). Besides some doubt from a morphological point of view, this occurrence is also difficult to be interpreted in terms of chronology. The only stratigraphic information recorded for the potsherd at the issue is a generic provenance from building QN16, which had a very peculiar architectural history. Indeed, at a moment difficult to ascertain in terms of absolute chronology, but likely at a very late phase of the life at the site, a small community of farmers settled in a small “village” established in the large court of the building, after the latter had lost its original function (Scerrato 1970: 136 and fig. 8). A late chronology for the ceramic fragment at issue, therefore, cannot be excluded.

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³⁵ On the importance of water resources for the distribution of Late Iron Age sites in the area see Fathi Sogolitepeh et al. 2021.

³⁶ But see above, fn. 16.

³⁷ Works written in Persian are transliterated according to the system adopted by *Encyclopædia Iranica*; the English translation of the titles is reported in square brackets; the Persian name of scientific journals and book series is not translated.

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