



DARRAGAZ II. ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

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The valley of Darragaz, approximately halfway between the headwaters of the Atrak and Kašāfrūd rivers in the south and the fertile foothills (*atak*) of southern Turkmenistan bordering the Kara Kum desert in the north, is relatively fertile and prosperous and contains numerous archeological sites (*tapas*), some of which date back to at least as early as Chalcolithic times, suggesting that the region was equally prosperous and densely settled during specific prehistoric and historic periods.

Henri Frankfort first published archeological ceramics from Moḥammadābād (see i, above) in 1924, comparing them with those excavated earlier by Raphael Pumpelly at Anau. In 1966 'Ezzat-Allāh Negahbān visited Darragaz and collected sherds from Yarim (Yarem) Tepe, the largest prehistoric site on the plain, but this work has never been published. The most systematic exploration of the valley was conducted by P. L. Kohl and D. L. Heskell on two short visits in the late summer and early fall of 1978 (1980; 1982). Thirty-two sites in the valley and an additional four on the road north to what was then the Soviet border were identified and their dates and sizes estimated from the distribution of surface remains; Yarim Tepe, which rises ca. 35 m above the contemporary level of the plain and covers an area of ca. 8 ha, was mapped and investigated more intensively.



On the basis of this preliminary work, it appears that Darragaz was densely settled during the Sasanian and early Islamic periods, and a substantial occupation is also suggested for the Achaemenid period. Four sites containing prehistoric materials identical to those excavated by Soviet archeologists in southern Turkmenistan were recorded, and it is believed that the surface materials of many later sites probably cover earlier, prehistoric occupations. It was also determined that the cultural deposit at Yarim Tepe extends ca. 3 m beneath the level of the plain, suggesting that many other early sites may have been buried as a result of alluvial processes.

Although the site of Yarim Tepe is badly eroded, materials collected from the surface suggest occupation throughout the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age; comparable materials are known from the southern Turkmenistan sequence (named after the type site Namazga I-VI, ranging from the early 5th millennium to the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C.E.). Yarim Tepe may also have been occupied on a smaller scale during Achaemenid and Sasanian times. The site, apparently occupied over its full surface, may have covered about 16 ha during the Late Aeneolithic and Early Bronze Age (Namazga III-IV, late 4th-early 3rd millennium B.C.E.), but much of this surface has been lost through erosion and destruction of the site. Diagnostic Early Bronze Age ceramics were collected from the base to the summit of the mound. The possibility of recovering a substantial intact array of Early Bronze architecture thus seems great and would augment considerably understanding of the so-called “urban revolution” in southern Central Asia.

These preliminary investigations in Darragaz clearly link materials recovered in the upper Atrak valley of northeastern Persia with those known from southern Turkmenistan. Archeological materials from Darragaz should thus ultimately play a pivotal role in the reconstruction of the prehistory and early history of Khorasan

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