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ITALY VI. ITALIAN EXCAVATIONS IN IRAN

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(1) General Survey

From the early 20th century on, Italians participated in the scholarly investigation of ancient Iranian history and culture, most notably Ugo Monneret de Villard, but Italy's direct involvement in field archaeology in Iran dates from relatively recent times. The first agreement between the Iranian Archeological Services and the Institute for the Middle and Far East (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, IsMEO, q.v.) was reached only in 1959. Under its learned and dynamic director, Giuseppe Tucci (q.v.), IsMEO had already started archeological research in Pakistan (1956) and Afghanistan (1957).

Tucci played a leading role in Italian archeological investigations in Asia. He

was primarily a scholar of the history and culture of Tibet and the religions of the Indian subcontinent and Eastern Asia, but he was also interested in Iranian cultures of the proto-historic, pre-Islamic, and Islamic periods (Scerrato, 1995, pp. 99-105). While not an archeologist, he keenly recognized that the discipline offered new sources of information for solving important cultural problems, especially in relation to the history of Buddhism. Through the combination of IsMEO's organizational flexibility and his own ability to promote large-scale enterprises, Tucci succeeded in organizing a Center for Archeological Excavation and Research in Asia (Centro Scavi e Ricerche Archeologiche in Asia). From that point, diverse projects began to be initiated abroad. These were noted for thorough, up-to-date research methodologies in all aspects—stratigraphic methods of excavation, careful attention to the conservation of buildings and artifacts, and study of all of the archeological evidence, both material culture and paleozoological and paleobotanical remains; together, these approaches provided a holistic perspective that for its time was truly revolutionary. The publication of the results obtained were always timely, rich in descriptive details, and lavishly illustrated with plates of superb quality. They opened a new phase in the proper dissemination of archeological research.

In its early phases the Center received some support from the cultural organizations of the city of Turin, but from 1962 IsMEO became the sole support of its archeological work. In 1962 also, IsMEO made a commitment to architectural restoration, setting up a new Center for Conservation and Restoration (Centro per la Conservazione ed il Restauro) under the directorship of G. Zander.

Since 1960 the Center for Archeological Excavation has organized large-scale excavations in the region of Sistān (discussed separately; see SISTĀÚÚN ii.); the Center for Conservation carried out especially significant research at Persepolis and Isfahan.

Conservation and restoration work at Persepolis began in 1964. In 1965 it came under the guidance of the conservation expert Giuseppe Tilia, who worked with his wife, A. B. Pettersson-Tilia, on all aspects of preliminary site research, as well as on restoration (Tilia, 1972, 1978). Collaborating in the effort to lay down a comprehensive methodological framework were the two Center directors, G. Zander and D. Faccenna (of the Center for Archeological Excavation), and, from 1973, A. Shapur Shahbazi, who had founded The Institute of Achaemenid Research at Persepolis. This work of IsMEO's Italian

expedition has come to be recognized as a fundamental contribution to clarification and verification, following the American and Iranian excavations. The following achievements of the Tilias are especially noteworthy: (1) complete investigation of the Terrace Wall (Tilia, 1978, p. 1 ff.); (2) discovery that the two orthostats bearing audience scenes, which were found in the Treasury (one is now in the National Museum of Iran, Tehran), originally decorated the central facades of the Apadāna staircases (Tilia, 1972, pp. 173 ff.); (3) understanding of the construction techniques of the foundation level of the complex (Tilia, 1968; 1972, pp. 125 ff.); (4) ascertaining of the main plan of the staircase of Palace H (Tilia, 1972, pp. 241 ff.); (5) reconstruction of the parapet along the southwest corner of the terrace's retaining wall, characterized by a coping with horn-like elements which were uncovered just in front of the wall; (6) identification of the techniques of construction and decoration for various buildings in which the color scheme played an important role both for the plaster elements and for the carved stone surfaces (Tilia, 1978, pp. 29 ff.; Tilia, 1995); (7) restoration from fragments of three columns in the Gate of All Lands, east Apadāna portico, and north portico of the Hundred Column Hall; (8) discovery of the original entrance to Persepolis (from the south). Additionally, some work was done on the Achaemenid bridge at Dorudzan and at Pasargadae (q.v.): (9) cleaning and restoration of the Tomb of Cyrus the Great; (10) reassembling of a number of columns in Cyrus's palaces there. Also important was G. Tilia's training of a number of Iranian artisans in restoration and conservation techniques, which made it possible to continue his plans even after he left the site in 1978.

As with Persepolis, the conservation activity at Isfahan, led by E. Galdieri and begun in 1970 in the Friday Mosque (Masjed-e Jomʿa), was based on a stratigraphic analysis of the architectural structures and on soundings conducted underneath the main floor. These contributed to reveal some architectural elements from the pre-Islamic period, to determine the original hypostyle structure as a 9th-century Abbasid mosque in the "Arab" style, and to document architectural activity from the Buyid (10th-11th centuries) and Saljuqid (11th-12th centuries) periods (Galdieri, 1972-84). The need for a more thorough understanding of the most ancient phases led to the start of a series of investigative stratigraphic excavations, conducted during 1972-78 by U. Scerrato, that threw light on basic characteristics of the building (Scerrato, 1973-78; 2001). They also clarified the Sasanian-period phase of Yahudiya, one of the predecessor towns of the city of Isfahan. (The other was Jay: see GABAE.) "Yahudiya" sometimes was synonymous with Isfahan; see Moqaddasi, p. 388,

where he also describes the Friday Mosque. (See also ISFAHAN.) According to the sources, the Friday Mosque of Isfahan was constructed on the site of a Nestorian church, which might correspond to the monumental building discovered below the north section of the mosque along the south side of a broad, open space. (The space was also lined with other monumental buildings prior to the mosque and did not function as the courtyard for the Friday Mosque.) Above this pre-Islamic building, remains were found of an 8th-century mosque, which appears to be the first one, founded in 772. The mosque's *qeble* wall (i.e., that oriented towards Mecca) has a particular importance in that its luxuriant foliage decorations in carved and painted stucco constitute a primary source of evidence for pre-Samarra Iranian art. The excavations also produced evidence for the Saljuq period indicating that, under the domed room of Neẓām al-Molk, an earlier project had been begun and later was abandoned.

Another IsMEO project was the survey of the proto-historic site of Shahdad (Šahdād: Salvatori, 1978; Salvatori and Vidale, 1982), the cemetery of which had already been excavated by ʿAli Ḥākemi (Hakemi, 1997) of the Iranian Center for Archeological Research. The survey was conducted in 1977, thanks to the availability of Ḥākemi, who was then directing an archeological expedition at Lut. Time limitation prevented use of the most advanced techniques and strategies in the survey. Nevertheless, more than half of the site was systematically explored, and 37 areas containing large concentrations of material culture were identified. The results were important for chronology, because they confirmed that the site definitely was occupied by the beginning of the 4th millennium B.C.E., without excluding the possibility of an even earlier settlement similar to that of Tepe Yaḥyā, dating to the end of the 5th millennium B.C.E. In terms of topography, it was found that the nucleus of the settlement moved from east to west during the 4th millennium, and again in the 3rd millennium B.C.E., when it appears to have also moved from south to north. From the results of the archeological excavation it was possible to define areas used for artisanal production, with the important further recognition of areas for the production of ceramics, metals, and semiprecious stones.

Italian archaeology in Iran is not limited to IsMEO, for from the mid-1970s other Italian institutions also established field research projects in various regions of Iran. In 1976 the University of Turin participated in a joint program with the University Museum of Pennsylvania and the Iranian Center for

Archeological Research, known as the Hesar Restudy Project (Dyson and Howard, 1989); it was undertaken out of a need to study this fundamental site, uncovered in the region of Dāmḡān during the 1930s, more thoroughly (Dyson & Howard, 1989). After various visits to the site by scholars in the 1950s, G. M. Bulgarelli had conducted a limited surface survey in 1972 (Bulgarelli, 1974), followed by a re-examination of the pottery by J. Deshayes. Unlike the earlier studies, the Hesar Restudy Project was a structured program of architectural and stratigraphic investigations, intended to analyze the site in terms of its environment and economics, to highlight the changes in the settlement pattern, to identify different production areas through the analyses of slag, to collect carbon samples for the creation of an absolute chronology, and to study in a more complete manner the architectural remains and the ceramic artifacts. As part of the activities of the University of Turin, R. Biscione conducted a stratigraphic study of the westernmost mound of the “Twins”; M. Tosi with G. M. Bulgarelli and I. Reindell completed an architectural and stratigraphic study of the South Hill; M. G. Bulgarelli studied the lithics and lapis lazuli; and M. Tosi was responsible for the collection of the paleobotanical and zoological research materials.

The University of Turin Expedition also undertook a study of the upper valley of the Atrek in northern Khorasan, directed by R. Venco Ricciardi. From 1976 to 1978 a complete survey was performed of the valley bottom, to an elevation of 1500 m above sea level; there followed two stratigraphic soundings at Tepe Yam and Tepe Ḵorramābād, made possible through financial aid from the Iranian Center for Archeological Research (Venco Ricciardi, 1980; Biscione, 1981). A total of 180 mounds were identified, indicating an almost uninterrupted occupation from the Chalcolithic Period to recent times. The lack of identifiable materials from the Neolithic Period may be due to the limited topography covered during the survey, and the same reason may be given in the case of the materials from the Late Bronze Age, which were discovered only in the soundings of Tepe Yam. From the first archeological evidences, it was apparent that this area had a strong connection with southern Turkmenistan and the Central Asian world, rather than with other regions of the Iranian Plateau. A detailed analysis was made of the ceramic materials at the main sites in comparison with those of the region and of areas beyond; thus the settlement patterns of the various proto-historic and historic periods were outlined with sufficient clarity. This was also done for the Parthian and Sasanian periods, which previous surveys had not been able to fully clarify.

From 1976 to 1978 Italian researchers from the Institute of Mycenaean and Aegean-Anatolian Studies (a branch of the National Research Council [Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche]) conducted surface surveys, directed by P. E. Pecorella and M. Salvini, in the Urmia and Ušnaviye plains, as well as in the area between Lake Urmia and the Zagros Mountains in Iranian Azarbaijan (Pecorella, 1984). The field research was comprehensive in approach, leading to the documentation of every trace of human occupation from the prehistoric to the present, but with a specific concern for the Urartian culture. The complexity of the initial data, which is very rich for the pre- and proto-historic periods and extremely poor for Parthian and Sasanian times, made a continuous "story" impossible, and as a result the majority of studies have concentrated on the period between the 4th and the 1st millennia B.C.E. and on the Islamic period. Thus the material culture of the pre- and proto-historic phases has been clearly defined (Neolithic, Chalcolithic, IV millennium, III millennium, II millennium B.C.E., Iron Age I, Iron Age II, Iron Age III); those for the phases later than Iron Age III and prior to Islam were classified under a generic definition of "Late Period" pottery. The paucity of material obtained from the archeological survey prompted further investigations. Two soundings were carried out, supervised by M. R. Belgiorno, R. Biscione, and P. E. Pecorella, at the Uratian fortress of Qālʿa-ye Esmāʾil Āqā in 1977, and at the site of Tepe Gijlar in the Urmia plain in 1978. The paleo-botanical remains and the obsidian artifacts found at these two sites were investigated in detail (see, respectively, Costantini and Biasini, in Pecorella and Salvini, 1984, pp. 397-402; Capannesi and Palmieri, in ibid., pp. 385-95).

An important highlight of Italian archeological work in Iran lies in the area of paleobotanical research, which formed part of the studies in Sistān and later at Tepe Yaḥyā, Tepe Ḥesār, Qālʿa-ye Esmāʿil Āqā, and Tepe Gijlar. For L. Costantini, Director of the Laboratory of Bioarchaeology of the Museum of Oriental Art and of IsMEO/IsIAO (Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente), this work was an opportunity to collect a considerable amount of information on the arboreal population and general paleoenvironment of various regions of Iran, as well as on proto-historical agriculture (Costantini, 1975; Costantini and Dyson, 1990).

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(2) Excavations in Sistān

The Italian archeological activity of IsMEO (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), Rome (now Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, IsIAO), in Iran began in 1959 when Prof. U. Tucci opened a long and rich series of activities that ended only in 1978. Three geographical areas constituted IsMEO's main interest in Iran: Sistān, Fārs, and Isfahan. In Sistān, G. Gullini and U. Scerrato started surveying the whole territory, one of the most important regions for Iranian history. The starting point was the work of Tate in 1906, who had identified many archeological sites in the area that were later also investigated by Sir Aurel Stein and E. Herzfeld (q.v.). The Italian activities from 1959 to 1978 were mainly at the following sites: Šahr-e Suḵta (Bronze Age), Dahan-e Ḡolāmān (q.v., Achaemenid period), Kuh-e Ḵᵛāja (Parthian), Qalʿa-ye Sām (Parthian), Qalr̲ʿa-ye Tappe (Sasanian and Islamic), Tappe Šahrestān (Parthian), and Bibi Dust (Islamic). In order to understand the regional history of Sistān, the Italian fieldwork and studies were at first devoted to the historical and geographical context of ancient Drangiana (q.v.). The name of the territory, first attested in Old Persian in the great Bisotun (q.v.) inscription of Darius I as "Zranka," is reflected in the Elamite, Akkadian, and Egyptian versions of the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, as well as in Greek and Latin sources. The Drangians were listed among the peoples ruled by the legendary King Ninus, before the Achaemenids, but there is no evidence for the situation of the country during the Median period; it may well have belonged to the Median Empire, or it may instead have been part of an eastern Iranian proto-state centered on Mary (Marv) and Herat (q.v.). In the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, Drangiana is listed as a separate province, but its position varies. The land was historically characterized as rich in tin, a crucial element for the manufacture of bronze weapons.

First in the chronological sequence of Italian activities was the work on a basaltic island in the Hāmun-e Helmand (see HĀMUN, DARYĀČE-YE), the location of a majestic palace/sanctuary, Kuh-e Ḵᵛāja, first dateable to the Achaemenid period. Successive trenches on the site revealed, on the basis of the pottery found there, a dating to the Hellenistic-Parthian period. Particularly significant was the removal and restoration in 1975-76 of a small fresco from the Kuh-e Ḵᵛāja palace. In 1963 an excavation was carried out at the fortified center of Qalʿa-ye Sām, whose encircling wall has approximately the same shape as that at Parthian Nisa. Besides the characteristic painted pottery (termed *dipinta storica sistana*) which is useful for dating the deepest

layers of Kuh-e Ḵᵛāja, other pottery evidently related to Hellenistic ware and a number of ostraca with Greek epigraphy were brought to light. These inscriptions reveal that the citadel dates to the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E. Particularly interesting were the activities at Qalʿa-ye Tappe, where a long chronological sequence from the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 11th-12th century C.E. was recognized.

The Islamic period was the subject of the field survey at the site of Bibi Dust. The site takes its name from the grave of a saintly woman located under a large, miraculous tree. The pottery collected there, which is dateable from the ʿAbbāsid period to the 15th-16th century, indicates that the Timurid invasion, contrary to what had been believed up to then, was not the main reason for the abandonment of Sistān.

Amongst the most important sites investigated and extensively excavated by the Italians in Sistān are Šahr-e Suḵta and Dahan-e Ḡolāmān.

The excavation of the protohistoric center of Šahr-e Suḵta, identified earlier by Stein, began in 1967. A well-established set of cultural relations with various, and distant, geographical and cultural areas is documented from its foundation at the end of the 4th millennium B.C.E.; thus the city is one of the key sites for the study and analysis of the formative cultural processes of Central Asian civilization between the end of the 4th and the 3rd millennium B.C.E. and for the study of the recent prehistory of Central Asia. From Period I, the material culture is known either from settlements or from an extensive cemetery, which shows close connections with the late Chalcolithic centers of southern Turkmenistan, the Kandahar (Qandahār) region in Afghanistan, the Quetta valley in southern Baluchistan, the Bampur valley in southeastern Iran, and the Proto-Elamite cities of Ḵuzestān and Fārs. During Period II, the city kept in contact with the pre-Harappan centers of the Indus valley, the cities of southern Turkmenistan, and the Bampur valley. It seems highly likely that relations with Mundigak in Afghanistan were close, and it was probably from here that lapis lazuli came during this period, reaching Šahr-e Suḵta from the distant mines of Badaḵšan. For that reason, scholars began to speak of a “Helmand Civilization.”

Period III (phases 4, 3, and 2) is marked by great change in the archeological sequence. The city changes its architectural form completely with the construction of large buildings enclosed by massive encircling walls. The pottery production becomes standardized and loses the characteristic painted

ornamentation of the previous period; in the burials one can note a widening socio-economic gap between the various sectors of the population. At the end of Phase 4, the materials imported from Mesopotamia and western Iran disappear, and this suggests an interruption in the relationships with those regions, while the communication and trade routes with Mundigak, Bampur, and the Indus valley cities remain open. In Period IV, up to now known only through the excavation of the so-called “Burnt Palace” and of the pottery kilns of Tappe Rud-e Biābān 2 in the southern delta of the Helmand, Šahr-e Suḵta maintained contacts with only the Bampur valley (as shown by numerous close relationships with typical Bampur V-VI pottery) and the Kandahar area. A group of lapis lazuli processing sites was discovered in 1972 in the western quarters of the city. On the surface, a consistent concentration of flint, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and other types of stone fragments was observed. These workshops still remain unique in the whole Near and Middle East with regard to the level of conservation thirty years after their discovery. The excavations at Šahr-e Suḵta yielded other important evidence about the role played by the process of working semiprecious stones. In some graves, instruments and half-finished products were buried along with the corpse; the chalcedony and lapis lazuli cutters thus exercised their profession for the “other world” as well as for this one.

About 2500 B.C.E., the area of the old settlement and many other city quarters were occupied again by a large building, of which, unfortunately, only the massive foundation walls remain. In traditional societies, both European and Oriental, craft specialization was an economic activity of a familiar type, organized within precise urban spaces around courtyards, and it involved adults and children, both male and female. Probably, with the birth of the State at the end of the 4th millennium B.C.E., the most specialized manufacture was placed under the control of the elite, and workshops started to develop around the palace and temple areas. The study of the wooden remains collected during the excavation of the eastern, residential area should provide evidence of the industrial activities within family units. Up to now, we have known of no other proto-urban settlement anywhere in the Middle East that has preserved hundreds of wooden finds in residential deposits.

Around 2700 B.C.E., the major part of the city was destroyed by a fire, which marked the end of Phase 7. Rooms with burnt plaster, filled with ash and burnt remains of roof beams have been excavated in the eastern residential quarter and in the central quarter. The reasons for the disaster are unknown,

but there is no evidence that the fire was due to an enemy attack. The old cities were easy prey to fires, and Šahr-e Suḵta was probably not an exception. During phase 6, the city was soon reconstructed, although some destroyed houses were left abandoned for more than a century, until the time of the great expansion of the site during phases 5 and 4.

In 1962, the discovery of Dahan-e Ḡolāmān, ca. 40 km northeast of Šahr-e Suḵta, revealed macroscopic remains of a city that was considered to be the old Zranka of the Achaemenid inscriptions, Zarin of the classical sources (see DAHAN-E ḠOLĀMĀN), the capital of the satrapy of Drangiana. The presence of roads, private houses, and public buildings testifies to the urban character of the remains, something unusual for the Achaemenid period in Iran. A religious building (no. 3) relates the town to a possible fire cult in the area, later related to Zoroastrianism. The location of Dahan-e Ḡolāmān in a peripheral area, far from the center of the empire, allows one to consider it from a very different perspective from the one usually applied to Achaemenid culture. A new conception of the first half of the 1st millennium B.C.E. in Iran emerges, of which the main aspects can be summed up as follows: (1) an urban core with groups of buildings around it; (2) frequent use (though not very well attested) of water supply channels; (3) precise distinction between public and private spaces.

The presence of a zone close to the urban center where numerous remains of pottery production (Namaki) have been identified, and of a square precinct, suggest in the first case a craftsmen’s quarter, and in the second, a military garrison. The city would have had a complex system of functions, amongst which one would be ceremonial-religious (no. 3), one ceremonial-civil (no. 2), one economic (Namaki), and finally, one military-administrative. The basic idea underlying the foundation of Dahan-e Ḡolāmān was clearly related to the history of an Oriental satrapy progressively and slowly absorbed into the political and administrative system. The palatial architecture of Dahan-e Ḡolāmān represents a sort of meeting point of different building traditions and experiences from widely separated geographical areas, that is, those of the palaces of Bactria and Chorasmia, of northwestern Iran, of Fārs, and of Susiana. All of these seem to be reflected in a perfect synthesis at Dahan-e Ḡolāmān. The particular nature of building no. 3, with the presence of different fire installations, leads one to think of a building in some manner related to a fire-oriented cult.

In the last few years, new excavations at Šahr-e Suḵta and some trenches at

Dahan-e Ḡolāmān have been carried out by the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization. The first results seem to confirm the extraordinary importance of the sites, adding significant new aspects to our knowledge of the material culture.

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