



KAFTARI WARE

KAFTARI WARE, distinctive ceramic vessels dated to the late 3rd and early 2nd millennia BCE, primarily found in Fārs.

Kaftari ceramics were named and first characterized by Louis Vanden Berghe (1954, pp. 402-403) on the basis of surface surveys and limited soundings carried out in the Marv Dasht (Marv-dašt) region of the Kur River basin in highland Fārs. The range of stylistic variation in the ceramics that fall under this name has been most clearly shown by more systematic surveys across the Kur River basin and excavations at the site of Tall-e Malyan (see [MALIĀN](#)), both led by William Sumner (1972, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1999). Kaftari type ceramics have been identified at sites in intermontane valleys in other parts of highland Fārs, including [Fasā](#) and Mamasani, and at Tol-i Nokhodi, close to Pasargadae. Examples have also been recovered on the Bušehr peninsula and at sites in different parts of the Persian Gulf, including Failaka, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (see Petrie et al., 2005).

In Fārs archaeology, the term Kaftari has been used to label ceramic vessels, assemblages, and wares, and is also typically used as the name for the chronological period during which these ceramics were in use. Radiocarbon dates and relative parallels with ceramic assemblages from Khuzestan (Kūzestān) and the Central Zagros suggest that what has been referred to as the “fully articulated Kaftari style” was in use at Tall-e Malyan between circa 2200 and 1600 BCE (after Miller and Sumner, 2004, pp. 87-88), providing the acknowledged dates for the Kaftari period in Fārs (Voigt and Dyson, 1992, I, pp. 142-43, II, Table 2). It is notable that Kaftari vessels only appear at Persian



Gulf sites in deposits that date between circa 2100 and 1900 BCE (Petrie et al., 2005, pp. 70-76; R. Carter, 2002, 2003; see below).

The Kaftari ceramic assemblages that have been recovered from Tall-e Malyan are primarily comprised of vessels made from two distinct wares: a grainy vegetal tempered buff ware with a smooth surface, and a fine, grit tempered red-slipped ware, both of which appear in painted and unpainted varieties (Sumner, 1972, 1992, 1999; Nickerson, 1983, p. 113ff). Of these, the Kaftari painted buff ware is particularly distinctive, displaying parallel groups of fine brown bands that are separated by wavy lines and other more elaborate motifs, including hatching, vegetal or zoomorphic elements, the most distinctive of the latter being the depiction of a bird, which appears in various forms and typically faces left (see [FIGURE 1](#) and [FIGURE 2](#)). A burnished grey ware has also been observed, with the vessel body showing incised and punctate decoration with white in-filled circles (Sumner, 1992, p. 287; E. Carter, 1984, p. 152). Similar vessels have also been recovered from the Diyala, Central Zagros, southern Mesopotamia and Susa in early 2nd millennium BCE deposits, suggesting that it was a widely traded ware at this time (E. Carter, 1990, p. 96; Potts, 1999, pp. 174-75; for a summary description of the vessel forms typically found in each of these Kaftari ware types, see [CERAMICS vi](#)). Here, the chronological and economic significance of Kaftari ceramics will be outlined.

Kur River basin and Tall-e Malyan. Our knowledge of the chronological and typological range of Kaftari ceramics comes primarily from excavations in various areas at Tall-e Malyan, which include Operations ABC, GHI, GGX98, FX106, By8, F26, Test Trench D, H5 sounding, and the recently excavated H1s sounding and G9/H9/I9 trench (Sumner, 1988, pp. 314-15; Nickerson, 1983; Miller and Sumner, 2004; Alden et al., 2005). Tall-e Malyan was the location of the ancient city of [Anshan](#), which was the highland capital of Elam at the time when the Kaftari ceramic assemblage was in use. During the Kaftari period, Tall-e Malyan reached its greatest extent, with an occupied area of 130 ha, enclosed by a wall encircling 200 ha (Sumner 1988, p. 317; 1989, p. 148; 1990, p. 106). At this time, Tall-e Malyan appears to have been the largest in a four-tier settlement hierarchy that spread throughout the Kur River Basin, and is characterized by Kaftari ceramics (Sumner 1988, 1989, p. 137, 148, Table 3-6, Fig. 1; 1990, p. 96, 106, Table 2, Figs. 26-28).

The 600 year span during which Kaftari ceramics were in use has been divided into Early, Middle, and Late phases, primarily on the basis of the stratigraphy



at Tall-e Malyan, and the observation that there was a relative increase through time in the proportions of Kaftari buff ware over Kaftari red-slipped ware (Nickerson, 1983, pp. 194-98; Sumner, 1989, p. 138). Analysis of the radiocarbon dates from these phases suggests that they can be dated as follows: Early Kaftari 2200-1900 BCE; Middle Kaftari 1900-1800 BCE; and Late Kaftari 1800-1600 BCE (Petrie et al. 2005, pp. 55-61, Table 3, Figs. 6-7; after Sumner, 1989, Table 4; Voigt and Dyson, 1992, II, Table 2). These absolute dates suggest that the Kaftari ceramics were in use contemporaneously with the Ur III, Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods in Mesopotamia, and the Ur III, Shimashki and Sukkalmah periods in Khuzestan (see Petrie et al., 2005, p. 53; after Stolper 1984, pp. 20-32; E. Carter 1984, pp. 146-54; Voigt and Dyson, 1992). Although Early, Middle, and Late Kaftari period deposits have been excavated at Tall-e Malyan, most of the known excavated material was recovered from Late Kaftari period deposits (see Petrie et al. 2005, p. 55, Table 2). Nickerson (1983, pp. 194-97) suggested that there was little stylistic development in the assemblage over time. While subsequent analysis has shown that it is possible to establish a relative sequence of vessel forms (Petrie et al., 2005, p. 55, Figs. 3-5), the way that the material has been published makes it impossible to determine whether specific forms are limited to particular phases.

The development of the Kaftari assemblage before 2200 BCE remains somewhat obscure, and it was only with the publication of the H5 sounding that it became clear that there was a transition from the early-mid 3rd millennium BCE Late Banesh phase ceramics to the Early Kaftari ceramics, at least at Tall-e Malyan (see Miller and Sumner, 2004, pp. 87-88). This observation was seemingly confirmed by the H1s sounding (Alden et al., 2005, p. 42), which suggests that there was no major hiatus between the Banesh and Kaftari periods at the site. At Tall-e Malyan Kaftari ceramics appear to evolve into the stylistically similar Qaleh ceramics around 1600 BCE, and these continue in use until the end of the 2nd millennium BCE (see [CERAMICS vi and viii](#)).

Other Regions of Highland Fārs. Outside of the Kur River basin, diagnostic Kaftari ceramic vessels and fragments have been recovered from the late phases at Tal-i Nokhodi (Goff 1963, 1964), which is located on the plain of Pasargadae, a relatively short distance to the east of the Tall-e Malyan. This material has been attributed to the Early Kaftari period (Sumner 1989, p. 139), and overlies 5th millennium BCE Bakun period occupation. Fragments were also recovered from limited soundings at Tal-i Zohak and Vakil-ābād in the



valley of Fasā (Stein, 1936), which is located over 160 kms to the south east of Tall-e Malyan. Kaftari ceramics characterize several occupation phases at both Tol-e Spid and Tol-e Nurābād in the district of Mamasani, which is a series of intermontane valleys that lie circa 100 kms to the west of the Kur River basin, along the main route between ancient Anshan and Susa (Petrie et al., 2005, p. 61; Potts and Roustaei, eds., in press). The Kaftari ceramics from Tol-e Spid appear to date to the Middle and Late Kaftari periods, while those from Tol-e Nurābād appear to date entirely to the Late Kaftari period. In both cases, there is clear evidence for a break in occupation between the Banesh and Kaftari period occupation (Petrie et al., 2005, pp. 62-65; Petrie et al., 2006; Weeks et al., 2006).

Sites on the Persian Gulf. Outside of Fārs, Kaftari ceramics have been recovered from non-stratigraphic excavations at Tol-e Peytul, ancient Liyan (Pézard, 1914), which is located close to the middle of the Bušehr Peninsula on the Persian Gulf coast. Inscriptions from the site suggest that was under the sway of the sukkalmahs of Susa and Anshan (Potts, 1999, p. 180), and it has also been suggested that there may have been a governor at the site (Sumner, 1989, p. 148). It is notable that Barbar type ceramics from Bahrain and soft stone vessels from the Oman Peninsula were also recovered (R. Carter, 2003; Potts, 1999, p. 180, 2003, p. 159; Petrie et al., 2005, p. 67).

Kaftari-related ceramic vessels have also been recovered from excavations at settlement F6 on Failaka and at Qala'at al-Baḥrain, where they formed a minor component of the ceramic assemblages from each site that have been dated circa 2100-1900 BCE and are dominated by Barbar and Mesopotamian type vessels (see Petrie et al. 2005, pp. 68-73, Fig. 14; after Højlund 1987; Højlund and Anderson, 1994). Kaftari ceramic vessels found in single and multiple inhumation burials in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have also been dated to circa 2200-1900 BCE (see Petrie et al., 2005, pp. 68-73; after Zarins, 1989; Lombard 1999; Potts, 2000, 2003; E. Carter, 2002, 2003). In these contexts, the Kaftari ceramics are typically only one component of extremely varied tomb assemblages that show connections between Mesopotamia, Iran, the Persian Gulf polities, the Indus Valley and Bactria (e.g. Potts, 2000, p. 116ff; Carter, 2002).

Kaftari Ceramics and Administrative Districts in Fārs. Although there is no doubt that Tall-e Malyan was the location of the city of Anshan, the precise limits of the land of Anshan are not clear. There is a correspondence between the distribution of the Kaftari ceramics in the Kur River basin and the



evidence for the settlement hierarchy centered at Tall-e Malyan, which might indicate that the land of Anshan extended to the limits of the Kur River basin (Sumner, 1989, p. 148; Petrie et al., 2005, p. 73). However, it is not precisely clear how far beyond the basin it may have extended. Despite the appearance of Kaftari ceramics in Bušehr and Fasā, the distances and geographical constraints between these regions and the Kur River basin have been used to argue that these areas may have been parts of different administrative districts (Sumner, 1989, p. 148; Petrie et al., 2005, p. 61, 73). This might also be true for Mamasani (Petrie et al., 2005, pp. 66-67), but there is a lack of textual evidence that would substantiate any of these assertions. The presence of Kaftari ceramics in Mamasani has previously been used to support the suggestion that this region may have been the location of the ancient district of Huhnur, which was referred to as the ‘Key to the Land of Anshan’ (Petrie et al., 2005, p. 52, 75). However, the discovery of an inscription has confirmed that Huhnur was the site of Tepe Bormi, near Rām-Hormoz (Nasrabadi, 2005). Although Tepe Bormi has not yet been excavated, surveys of the site and the Rām-Hormoz plain have not recovered any distinctive Kaftari ceramics, although there are parallels to Qaleh wares (Wright and Carter, 2003, p. 69, Fig. 6.7). This suggests that although Huhnur is referred to as the ‘Key to the Land of Anshan,’ it was not within the distribution of the Kaftari wares.

Chronological and Economic Significance. While the Kaftari ceramic assemblage was in use contemporaneously with the Ur III, Shimashki and Sukkalmah period in Khuzestan, the best parallels between the ceramics used in the two regions date to the Sukkalmah period circa 1900-1600 BCE (E. Carter, 1979, pp. 122-23, 1992; Petrie et al. 2005, p. 53, 61). It should, however, be noted that the parallels with Susa are for undecorated vessels (Petrie et al., 2006; E. Carter, 1979, pp. 122-23), which indicates that the decorated Kaftari ceramics might have remained primarily a highland phenomenon in the early to mid 2nd millennium BCE.

In many ways, the discovery of Kaftari ceramics at the site of Tol-e Peytul (Liyān) is not surprising, as Bušehr continues to be one of the best port locations on the north side of the Persian Gulf. The appearance of Kaftari ceramic vessels in settlement and tomb contexts in other parts of the Persian Gulf is particularly interesting, as it suggests that the polities of southwest Iran were actively engaged in trade and interaction with the other Persian Gulf polities during the late 3rd and early 2nd millennia BCE. The lack of Kaftari vessels in the Persian Gulf after c.1900 BCE suggests that something dramatic



has occurred to change the nature of these relations at this time.

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