



NEGAHBAN, EZAT O.

NEGAHBAN, EZAT O. (‘Ezzat-Allāh Negahbān; b. Ahvāz, 1 March 1926; d. Philadelphia, 2 February 2009; [Figure 1](#)), eminent Iranian archaeologist.

Negahban was born in the city of Ahvāz to ‘Abd-al-Amir Negahbān and Roġia Didebān. When he was two years old, his father was elected to the Iranian parliament (*majles*), and the family moved to Tehran. Seven years later his father passed away while on a trip to Ahvāz. The young Neghban attended Jamšid-e Jam Elementary School, Firuz-e Bahrām High School, and the German Technical School. At 16, while still attending high school, he began working fulltime as a traveling accountant for the national railway, but he remained on a contract basis because he was too young to be hired as an employee. His wide-ranging travels, together with a fascination for the newly constructed Archeological Museum of Iran (Muze-ye Irān Bāstān), located near the German Technical School, prompted him to pursue the study of archaeology when the German school was closed down at the beginning of World War II.

Negahban enrolled in the Department of Archaeology at Tehran University, where he received his BA. In 1949 he traveled to the United States, attending the University of Michigan for English language study, and then in 1950 enrolled at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. He received his MA from the University of Chicago in 1954 after completing a thesis under Donald McCown (Negahbān, 1954).

Negahban never had financial support from Iran, due to his father’s early death, so he had to make a living for himself (as well as his sister who was



studying in Germany) by working as a baby photographer, a schoolbus driver, a Fuller brush salesman, and a steelworker at the mills in Gary, Indiana (Braidwood and Braidwood 1999, p. 1), among other jobs. While at the University of Chicago, he met his future wife Miriam Lois Miller, a student of library science, whom he married in 1955. Together they have five sons: Ali, Bahman, Mehrdad, Babak, and Daryush.

In 1955 Negahban returned to Iran with his wife, where he was appointed Assistant Professor in the Department of Archaeology at Tehran University after his credentials from the University of Chicago were evaluated as the equivalent of a PhD degree. Negahban was promoted to a full professorship in 1962, served as the Chairman of the Department from 1967 to 1978, and as the Dean of Faculty of Letters and Humanities from 1975 to 1979. He also served as the Technical Director of the Iranian Archaeological Service from 1960 to 1965, and as Technical Advisor of the Iranian Ministry of Culture from 1965 to 1979 (after the Archaeological Service was transferred from the Ministry of Education to Ministry of Culture). He was also Director of the Irān Bāstān Museum from 1966 to 1968.

The foremost Iranian archaeologist of his generation, Negahban's career had a number of major impacts on Iranian archaeology, earning him the informal appellation "Father of Modern Iranian Archaeology." His excavations at a number of key archaeological sites augmented our knowledge of Iranian archaeology and history. His restructuring of the curriculum at the Department of Archaeology of Tehran University, and in conjunction with that, founding of the Institute of Archaeology, raised the standards of indigenous Iranian archaeology to a more scientific and professional level, while his support of a wider and more systematic involvement in Iranian archaeology by expeditions from other countries elevated the field to unprecedented international levels.

Negahban carried out his first series of excavations in 1961 at the site of Mehrānābād about 25 km south of Tehran on the road to Sāveh in collaboration with T. Cuyler Young Jr. The site apparently dates to the early village period of the Central Plateau, but was heavily damaged during Sasanian times, making the discerning of earlier material very difficult, if not impossible (Malek Shahmirzādi 1977, pp. 434-35).

The same year, alarmed by rampant illicit diggings and lootings of archaeological sites in the Caspian Basin, Negahban organized a series of



surveys along the tributaries of the Sefidrud river in the Rudbār area, which resulted in the discovery of the important sites of Mārlik and Pileh Qaleh. Negahban immediately organized a team composed of members of the Archaeological Service together with a few students from Tehran University to excavate these sites. A long and arduous season of excavations carried out under very difficult conditions (Negahbān 1997 [1376 Š.], pp. 177-202; Ahkami 2003 [1382 Š.], p. 58), led to the discovery of fifty-two lavishly furnished burials dating to the late second-early first millennium B.C.E. Perhaps equally important was the nearby site of Pileh Qaleh, evidently with a sequence of occupation dating from the second millennium B.C.E. to middle Islamic times, including some constructions that may have been associated with the Mārlik burials (Negahbān, 1964a). Unfortunately, our knowledge of Pileh Qaleh is limited, as a change in the Ministry of Education (in which the Archaeological Service was based at that time) led to a withdrawal of the team's excavation permit and the shutdown of work at Pileh Qaleh. Negahban therefore focused his work on Mārlik, producing a series of general and specialized reports on the finds and documenting an early Iron Age society with evidence for social stratification, advanced weaponry, and a sophisticated art style (cf. Negahbān 1962, 1963 [1342 Š.], 1964b [1343 Š.], 1965, 1966, 1968a, 1972, 1976 [1355 Š.], 1977a, 1979a, 1981, 1983, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990a, 1995, 1996a, 1998, 2001).

In 1965, an accidental discovery at the Haft Tappeh sugarcane plantation in the far south in Khuzestān gave Negahban the opportunity to embark on a series of excavations in his home province. Always on the lookout for ways to advance Iranian archaeology, he found this an excellent opportunity to launch the first Iranian project in the archaeologically rich province of Khuzestān, hitherto a domain of foreign archaeologists, especially the French. Over fourteen seasons, lasting until the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Negahban and his team excavated a fairly sizeable area at Haft Tappeh revealing major constructions, courtyards, and tombs dating to mid-second millennium B.C.E. (Negahbān 1967, 1968b, 1969, 1975, 1977b, 1984, 1990b, 1993, 2002). Inscriptions discovered during the course of excavations and translated over the years (cf. Reiner, 1973; Herrero, 1976; Herrero and Glassner, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1996; Beckman, 1991) indicate that Haft Tappeh was ancient Kabnak, the royal residence of a hitherto little-known Elamite ruler named Tepti-Ahar. The Haft Tappeh excavations was one of very few projects focused on Elam carried out outside of Susa, thus adding a valuable dimension to our rudimentary knowledge of this part of Iranian history.



Perhaps most important in terms of its contribution to Iranian archaeology is an extensive and long-term regional project in the Qazvin Plain, on which Negahban embarked in 1970. The Qazvin Plain project pursued a two-pronged objective: requiring students of archaeology at Tehran University to participate in archaeological fieldwork to gain invaluable hands-on experience, and defining a regional chronological sequence for the relatively unknown Central Plateau. As the survey of the Plain was underway, three sites were selected for excavation: Sagzābād (covering the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age sequence), Qabrestān (covering the Chalcolithic sequence), and Zāgheh (covering the Neolithic sequence). Two new faculty members at Department of Archaeology, Tehran University who had just finished their MA degree at Chicago, served as Assistant Directors: Yousef Majidzādeh, who incorporated the results of his excavations at Qabrestān into his Chicago PhD dissertation on the Chalcolithic period of the Central Plateau (Majidzādeh 1976) and Sādeq Malek Shahmirzādi, whose excavations at Zāgheh formed the basis of his PhD dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania (Malek Shahmirzādi 1977). A joint team worked at Sagzābād (cf. Negahbān 1973, 1974) while Negahban continued to direct the entire project, participating in the excavations and making such interesting finds as the ‘Painted Building’ at Zāgheh (Negahbān, 1979b).

In addition to the major projects mentioned above (Mārlik, Haft Tappeh, and Qazvin Plain) Negahban carried out a number of smaller projects, including a 1965 survey in Khorāsān along the Soviet border and another survey in 1975-76 in the Kalārdasht Plain in the foothills of the Alborz Mountains in the central Caspian Basin (Negahbān, 2000).

Another area of Negahban’s contribution to Iranian archaeology was his important role in introducing changes into the curriculum of the Department of Archaeology of Tehran University, the only institution for training archaeologists in Iran at that time. The Department of Archaeology was one of the first academic departments to be established at the Faculty of Literature after the foundation of Tehran University in 1934. In 1940 the Department granted a Bachelor of Arts degree to its first graduate, the famous poet Fereidoun Tavalloli (Asgari Chāverdi, 2000). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Department had a more art-historical outlook due to the primary training of the majority of its senior faculty members, including Issā Behnām, Mohsen Moqaddam, and Ali-Naqi Vaziri. Once hired by the Department in 1956, Negahban gradually introduced a more archaeological approach in his



courses, but a major revision and updating of the curriculum along more scientific archaeological lines had to wait until Negahban was appointed Chairman of the Department in 1967. Perhaps the most important update to the curriculum was the addition of twenty units of fieldwork during the 1970-71 academic year, mandatory for both male and female students (Malek Shahmirzādi 1990, p. 428). For this purpose, Negahban had already negotiated with the Archaeological Service of Iran for a long-term permit to conduct fieldwork on the Qazvin Plain and had secured and restored a Safavid caravansery at Mohammadābād Kharreh between Qazvin and Bo'in Zahrā to serve as the base-camp of the Department's field school (Malek Shahmirzādi 1999; Negahbān 2003). This major achievement provided students with a unique opportunity to gain a firsthand experience in archaeological fieldwork.

With his foresight, Negahban also established a Master's program at the Department and secured scholarships for a number of students to pursue their higher education towards a PhD degree abroad. It is therefore not surprising that the 1970s produced some of the most prominent figures in Iranian archaeology. A number of Negahban's former students joined the Department as new faculty members, while others chose to work at the Archaeological Service. To these men and women, and ultimately to Negahban, we should be grateful for keeping Iranian archaeology alive as Iran chose to close its doors to the world archaeology from 1979 until recent years.

Negahban's classes on Iranian archaeology at Tehran University, open to students and other interested people alike, also attracted a number of foreigners who went on to become Iranian specialists, most notably William Sumner and Elizabeth Carter.

In 1959, Negahban founded the Institute of Archaeology of Tehran University and served as its Director until 1979. The founding of the Institute marks another turning point in Iranian archaeology. Technically, the permit holder for archaeological fieldwork at Qazvin Plain and Haft Tappeh was Tehran University, especially its Institute of Archaeology, but the funding came from the Archaeological Service. The difficult task of bringing together a permit and funding to carry out fieldwork was accomplished thanks to Negahban's key position in both institutions. Fieldwork in the Qazvin Plain was required for all the BA level students, while more advanced MA student went on to participate in the Haft Tappeh excavation. The Institute of Archaeology provided the instructors and students with office space, library, and laboratory facilities to conduct analyses on archaeological material and



produce publications on their fieldwork. Out of these endeavors appeared the first journal of the Department and Institute, which published two issues under the title Mārlik (in 1973 and 1977) and another issue as Kand-o-Kāv (1979), before its publication came to end with the ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1980-82).

While building the infrastructure of an indigenous archaeology apparatus, Negahban never neglected the view that Iranian archaeology could benefit from a wider, more systematic international involvement. World War II had brought archaeological field activities in Iran by foreign expeditions to a halt. After the War, archaeological field projects resumed over the course of ten years, but except for the University of Pennsylvania’s work in the Solduz valley (initiated by Robert H. Dyson in 1957), most other efforts were brief and haphazard. In a meeting at the International Congress for Prehistoric Archaeology in Hamburg in 1958, Negahban invited Robert J. Braidwood of the Oriental Institute to continue with his research into early stages of food production and sedentism in the Zagros mountains in Iran. Braidwood, whose work in Iraqi Kurdistān had come to a halt as a result of the July 1958 coup, gladly accepted Negahban’s invitation (Braidwood and Braidwood 1999) and carried out a series of groundbreaking archaeological surveys and excavations in western Iran in 1959-60 (cf. Braidwood, Howe, and Negahbān 1960). Thus was formed ‘The Iranian Prehistory Project’ that was continued by Braidwood’s students, especially with surveys in Susiana by Robert McCormick Adams (1962), and surveys and excavations in Deh Luran and Khorramabad plains by Frank Hole and Kent Flannery (1967). These projects paved the way for the introduction of processual archaeology to Iran (Hole 1995) and were soon followed by many expeditions from Western countries that catapulted Iran to the forefront of archaeological theory and methodology in Near Eastern archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s.

Last, but not least, one should not neglect Negahban’s role in combating illicit excavations and sale of archaeological material in the antiquities market in Iran and abroad (of which he carried a bitter reminder from his own work at Mārlik). As the Director of the 5th International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology held in Tehran in 1968, Negahban introduced a resolution that appealed to all countries, as well as to the UNESCO, to combat export, import, and sale of antiquities. The resolution, one of the first of its kind in the Near East, was passed almost unanimously, but earned Negahban both condemnation as a “bitter fanatic” (by Arthur Upham Pope) and praise as a



“decent man” (see Muscarella, 1999, for discussions surrounding this resolution). Negahban went on to attend two UNESCO meetings pursuing the subject, which ultimately resulted in a 1972 UNESCO resolution condemning the traffic in national cultural properties (Negahbān, 1378 Š., p. 313).

Negahban was by no means an ‘ivory tower’ academic. He had an acute interest in educating all Iranians about their country’s past. His excavations were open and active on Fridays, and visitors from all walks of life were always welcome to come and see the work in progress and to ask questions.

Skirmishes at Tehran University leading up to the 1978-79 Revolution and the ensuing ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1980-82) left a personal mark on Negahban when he was stabbed repeatedly by a group of six masked thugs as he left his car to enter his office at the university early one morning in the spring of 1978. As Negahban was recovering from his injuries, he chose retirement rather than continuing to work in such a hostile environment. Thanks to Robert H. Dyson, in 1980 he was appointed a Visiting Curator at the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, where he settled with his family and, free from administrative and teaching responsibilities, embarked on producing the results of his earlier fieldwork, including the comprehensive reports of his excavations at Haft Tappeh (Negahbān 1991) and Mārlik (Negahbān 1996a). Meanwhile, as early revolutionary zeal in Iran gradually gave way to more pragmatic policies, Negahban resumed his cooperation with the archaeology apparatus, serving as an advisor to the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization which published the Persian edition of his reports (Negahbān 1987 [1368 Š.], 1993 [1372 Š.], 1996b [1375 Š.]) as well as a number of other books (Negahbān 1996c [1375 Š.]) including his fascinating memoirs (Negahbān 1997 [1376 Š.]). In 1999 he was honored with their highest Cultural Heritage decoration for his lifetime contributions to Iranian archaeology. In the same year, Negahban’s students and colleagues from Iran and abroad put together a festschrift honoring him and his unique position in Iranian archaeology (Alizadeh, Majidzadeh, and Malek Shahmirzadi 1999).

Unfortunately, Negahban was hit by a car while crossing the street near his home in August 2001 and was no longer able to produce papers or books as a result of his massive injuries. For the next seven years he remained in his house in Philadelphia, where he and his wife Miriam were always happy to entertain guests, especially his old colleagues and students (and some students of his former students, including this author), who now continue with his illustrious legacy in Iranian archaeology. Negahban passed away on 2



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