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Significance of Cultural Continuity at the Site of Douranabad in the Study of Bronze Age and Iron Age in Southern Qazvin Plain

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Abstract

With many archeological sites, the southern area of the Qazvin Plain is among the significant areas of the Central Iranian Plateau where numerous studies and excavations have been carried out. However, the authors intend to re-examine the evidence regarding the settlement patterns during the Bronze and Iron Ages in this area, due to some unanswered questions and uncertainties. One of the revisited prehistoric sites in this area is Douranabad the findings from which were presumed to outline the settlement pattern of the Bronze and Iron Ages in the southern area of the Qazvin Plain. These findings indicate that the site has been occupied during the Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages, and therefore has an important status to study the cultural sequence and settlement patterns in the area. In addition, other evidence from some sites in the area, such as Sagzabad, Ghabrestan and Yass Tepe, confirms the presence of human communities in different phases of the Bronze Age to Iron Age in the southern areas of the Qazvin Plain and that the same sites were generally reoccupied in the Iron Age.

Keywords: Qazvin Plain, Settlement Pattern, Douranabad, Bronze Age, Iron Age

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

The Qazvin Plain is among the areas on the Iranian Plateau that has been considered by human communities during the prehistoric periods, and thus present numerous archaeological settlements. Hence, several archeological excavations and surveys have been carried out on the area in order to identify and explain the settlements as well as cultural interactions. However, the southern area of the Qazvin Plain or Buin Zahra region is the main focus of these archaeological researches.

The Bronze Age and transition to the Iron Age in the region is one of the issues that has received a lot of attention and some theoretical opinions have been raised about it. However, the number of surveys and excavations were not in proportion by comparison, which puts forth the possibility of discrepancies in the conclusions regarding the whole area. Thus, further review and comparison can help with explanation and outlining of the settlements and the transition phase from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. For this purpose, the authors re-examined the area in order to study the settlement patterns of the southern area of the Qazvin Plain in the Bronze and Iron Ages and to compare the findings of the excavations. Resent survey occasionally yielded different results compared with the theories that had already been introduced and led to the identification of expedient

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sites from the Bronze and Iron Ages that could be important in determining the settlements pattern of the ages in the southern area of the Qazvin Plain.

One of the most significant sites that presented cultural materials from the Chalcolithic to Iron ages is the less-known site of Douranabad, the data collected from which could be valuable to outlines the settlement pattern of the area in question from the Chalcolithic to the Iron Age. The findings of surveys on the site as well as the site itself would be described and analyzed in this article.

The Southern Area of the Qazvin Plain

The Qazvin province is located between 48° 45E and 50° 45E and 35° 27N and 36° 45N. It is bordered by Mazandaran and Gilan to the north, Zanjan to the west, Markazi and Hamadan to the south, and Alborz Province to the east. Covering an area of 15600 square kilometers, it is the 28th Iranian province in terms of size (Bakhtiari 2006: 144). Buin Zahra county is situated in the southern area of the province at 35° 25N to 36° 05N latitude and 48° 55E to 50° 13E longitude (Figure. 1), and covers an area of 2323 square kilometers (14.76% of the total area of the province). The climate of the area is affected by Meh (a cold wind) and Raz (a hot desert wind) winds. Buin Zahra uses surface waters, Khorrud, Avajrud, and Kolanjinchaii are the major rivers of the country.

Archaeological Investigations on the Southern Area of the Qazvin Plain

Archeological surveys and excavations in the southern area of the Qazvin Plain (Bin Zahra) date back to the 60 when a Belgian-Japanese team commenced the excavations at Sagzabad (Fazeli Nashli *et al.* 2011: 139). Later in 1968, some limited diggings were carried out by Mr. Mahani, chairman of Qazvin Department of Culture and Art (Azizi Kharanaghi *et al.* 2010-2011: 23). Between 1970 and 1979, several surveys and excavations were carried out by the Department of Archeology of the University of Tehran in the region, which was the culmination of archaeological studies in the region. After a few years, field studies resumed in the area. For example, the survey on the site of Mohammadabad (Sobuti 1993), survey of Qazvin Plain by Dr. Fazeli (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Sereshti 2006a), survey of Buin Zahra and Avaj by Dr. Mollasalehi (Mollasalehi 2004), survey on archaeological sites in the southern plain of Qezvin (Buin Zahra) (Mollasalehi 2007), excavations at Sagzabad Tepe by Dr. Niknami (Niknami 2008 and 2009), stratigraphic excavation at Tepe Zaghe by the Institute of Archeology (University of Tehran), excavation at Arasanj (Azadi 2006). In addition, several studies were conducted on the findings of these surveys and excavations, which had significant results in better understanding the cultural developments of prehistoric communities in the region (for example, Mashkour *et al*. 1999; Talai: 1984, Pollard *et al*. 2012, Mortazavi *et al*.2014). These studies cover various eras spanning from the prehistoric to the Islamic period, but the settlement patterns on the region, particularly in the Bronze and Iron Ages, have received less attention from researches.

Settlement Pattern in Buin Zahra

Settlement pattern can be defined as the distribution of human activities across the landscape and the link between such activities and the natural and social environment (Schreiber 1996: 236). The limited number of surveys in Buin Zahra have yielded a wide range of cultural material from the prehistoric periods to the contemporary period. In the first season of archeological survey in Buin Zahra and Avaj (summer of 2007), Mousterian tools were discovered from the mountainous area based on which the presence of human groups in the southern Qazvin Plain extended to the Middle Paleolithic Period (Mollasalehi *et al.* 2007: 1). In this systematic survey, some Paleolithic sites were discovered in Buin Zahra region (Vahdati Nasab 2011: 75) and also the artifacts that reflect the Levallois tradition from Middle Paleolithic Period were found in an area called Sepiddasht Plain (Vahdati Nasab *et al*. 2009).

Likewise, the discovery of Chaharboneh site in 2003 and its excavation in 2006 revealed evidence from the Neolithic period (Fazeli Nashli 2011), as well as Based on the results of several excavations



Figure. 1: *Location of Buin Zahra in Qazvin Province*
(After: https://www.mapsland.com/asia/middle-east/large-political
-and-administrative-map-of-iran-with-roads-railroads-and-cities-2001.
Redesigned and edited by the Authors)

at the site of Sagzabad, it was dated to the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Fazeli Nashli *et al*. 2011: 136), and then with the excavation in 2008 in the area between two sites of Segzabad and Ghabrestan, cultural materials from the chalcolithic Period was identified, that the history of settlement in this site was considered to the earlier period (Niknami 2009). On the other hand, the presence of an important Iron Age settlement in Sagzabad has been frequently confirmed by archaeological findings from it (Talai, 1983, 1999, 2002; Fazeli Nashli *et al* .2011:136-162). All these findings and evidences confirm the presence of human populations in different prehistoric periods in the region, but the topic of settlement patterns in the region has received less attention and discussion by researchers, and despite the identification of these various sites, explanations have been made about the absence of Bronze Age sites in the southern area of Qazvin Plain (Sohbati *et al*. 2008). In this regard, new findings from the site of Doranabad can also help to determine the cultural sequence and settlement patterns in the southern area of the Qazvin Plain.

Douranabad Tepe

In the 2003 survey conducted by Dr. Fazeli in the region, an important archaeological site was identified in the northern area of Buin Zahra,

which was assigned the code A08. The site is called Douranabad Tepe and located at 49˚52'15.1E longitude and 35˚53'36.6N latitude, 11 km northwest of Sagzabad Tepe. It covers an area of 240 m wide and 250 m length and has a height of 12 meters that is surrounded by farmlands (Figure. 2-4). On the basis of ceramics collected from the surface of the site, it was dated to the Bronze and Iron Ages with possibility of remains from the Chalcolithic Period. The site is among the most significant ones related to the Bronze and Iron Ages and can reveal significant information about transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age and Dr. Fazeli believes that there is a possibility of Chalcolithic strata underneath the Bronze Age remains (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Sereshti 2006a: 215).



Figure. 2: *Location of the archaeological sites in Buin Zahra region (After: Google Earth 2016/ 12/ 31)*



Figure. 3: *A view from Douranabad Tepe*



Figure. 4: *Aerial view of Douranabad Tepe. (After: Google Earth 2013/ 06/ 18)*

This discovery could prove effective in analyzing settlement patterns in the region and could prevent referring merely to findings from Sagzabad in this regard. Therefore, the authors re-visited the southern area of the Qazvin Plain and Douranabad Tepe in order to investigate the settlement patterns

of the region in In the first revisit in the summer of 2015, the authors were accompanied by a staff member of Buin Zahra Department of Cultural Heritage and Tourism to survey Doranabad and the surrounding sites. Upon the reports of local landowners, an illegal digging has been carried out on the east side of the site and then was filled again around which gray shards with characteristic of Iron Age ware scattered. These findings emphasized the importance of the site, followed by the registration of Doranabad in the list of national monuments by the ICTHM (Asgari 2017) (figure. 5).

Discussion

Surface materials, particularly pottery shards, collected on the surface of Doranabad reveal that the site has been occupied at least from the Late chalcolithic to the Iron Age. For the first time, Dr. Fazeli raised the possibility of a Chalcolithic stratum underneath the upper Bronze Age remains at the site (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Sereshti, 2006a: 215), which was further supported by the discovery of a painted shard from the dug and damaged part in the northwest of the site.

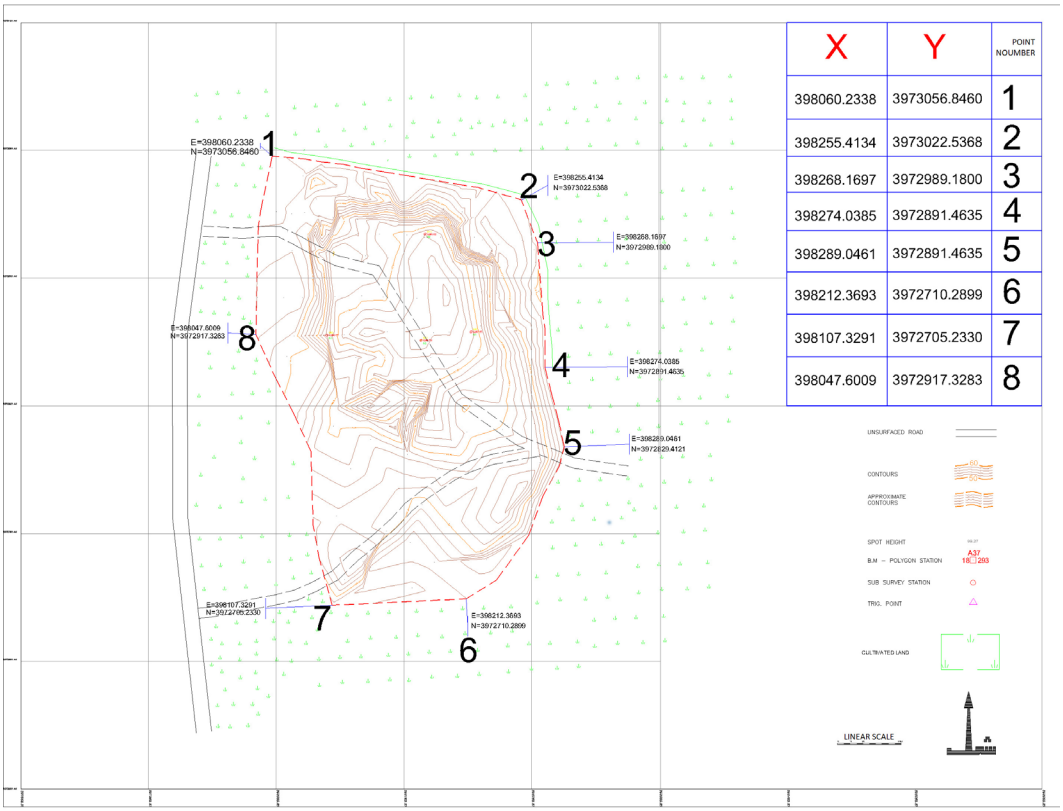


Figure. 5: *Topographical map of Douranabad Tepe (After: Asgari 2017: 29)*

Then, the site was revisited again in 2017 in order to outline the structure of the site, prepare maps and collect more indicative surface materials from various occupations on the site. Based on the spatial distribution of surface materials on the site, four points in the northeast, southeast and west of the site were considered for sampling. Collected materials were mainly the pottery shards with characteristic of the Bronze and Iron Ages wares (Figures. 7, 10-11).

Unfortunately, few specimens of this pottery type can be seen on the site, because of the high thickness of the upper remains of later periods as well as natural sediments on the plain surface that cover parts of the lower layers of the site (figure. 6). This painted shard is comparable with some Chalcolithic pottery found at Sagzabad (Azizi Kharanaghi and Niknami 2013-2014: 66. Figure 5) that is dated to the Late Chalcolithic period. Furthermore, in the national registration file of Doranabad, a pottery

shard has been reported (Asgari 2017: 16), which is comparable to Chalcolithic pottery and confirms the theory regarding the presence of a chalcolithic settlement at Doranabad (figure. 7).

In the surveys on Doranabad, some pottery shards were found that reveal the typical characteristic of Kura-Araxes pottery (figures.8-9) (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Serechti 2005: 23, Figure. 10). Some of these shards are decorated with incised and excised motives which are common in Kura-Araxes pottery tradition and are comparable with Kura-Araxes ceramics found from other sites in the northern areas of the Central Iranian Plateau, especially from Shizar (Fazeli *et al.* 2013: figure. 7.23) and Ostur (Piller 2012: Abb. 3-6).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Doranabad was occupied by the Kura-Araxes populations in the Early Bronze Age.



Figure. 6: *Chalcolithic pottery shard found on Douranabad Tepe in the 2015 survey*

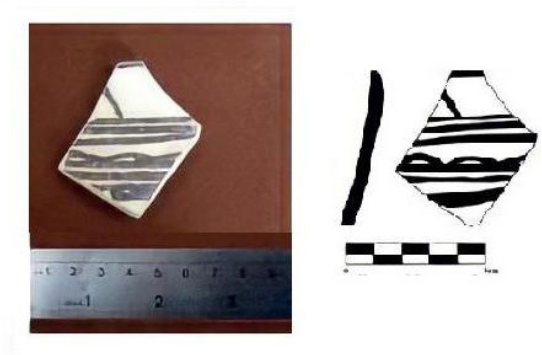


Figure. 7: *Chalcolithic pottery shard from Doranabad (After: Asgari 2017: 16)*



Figure. 8: *Early Bronze Age pottery shard found on Doranabad Tepe in the 2017 survey*



Figure.9: *Pottery sherds found on Doranabad Tepe in the 2003 survey*
(After: Fazeli Nashli 2003: 51)

Moreover, some gray shards were found from Doranabad that are distinct from the Kura-Araxes gray pottery; they are wheel-made and decorated with burnished design, instead of the incised and excised decorations on the Kura-Araxes pottery (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Sereshti 2006a: 215, figure. 6-1, 1 and 7). This pottery type is comparable with the Iron Age gray wares in the central Iranian Plateau and its presence at Doranabad point out that the site was occupied in the Iron Age (figure. 10).

According to the surface findings from the site of Doranabad, it can be perceived that this relatively large mound, with an area of about 6 hectares and more than 12 meters high, contains important remains of the Chalcolithic period, the Early Bronze and the Iron Ages (figure.11). In fact, Doranabad was an important settlement in the southern areas of the Qazvin plain during the Chalcolithic to Iron Ages which along with Sagzbad, Ghabrestan and Yass Tepe have a critical role in investigation of the prehistoric settlement patterns in the region.



Figure. 10. *Iron Age pottery shard found on Douranabad*



Figure. 11. *Bronze and Iron Ages pottery types found on Doranabad in the 2017 survey*

The 2009 excavation in Sagzabad revealed the existence of Chalcolithic layers underneath the Late Bronze Age remains, which is dated at the same time as the Chalcolithic settlement at the neighbor site of Ghabrestan (Azizi Kharanaghi and Niknami 2013-2014: 59). The Late Bronze Age settlement at the site is not well investigated, but its local polychrome pottery tradition, which have some similarity with Iron Age pottery, is well-known (Azizi Kharanaghi *et al.* 2010-2011). Furthermore, there was a significant Iron Age I settlement at Sagzabad (Talai 1983), which probably indicates the continuity of settlement at the site from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I. In addition, there was another Chalcolithic settlement on the site of Ghabrestan, which covers all three phases of this period (Fazeli Nashli and Abbasnezhad Sereshti 2006b: 85), and there was also an Iron Age cemetery on the site, which seems to have been associated with a simultaneous settlement in Sagzabad (Fazeli Nashli and Naghshineh 2006). On the other hand, in the course of revisiting the region, another large site with an area of about 14 hectares, was identified that is called Yass Tepe. On the basis of surface material, the site was occupied in the Bronze and Iron ages (Tahan and Naghshineh 2016). Consequently, there are various sites in the southern area of the Qazvin Plain that are frequently large and multi-period and have been occupied in the Chalcolithic period to the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Conclusion

In three surveys on the site of Doranabad in 2003, 2015 and 2017, some important materials were collected from the Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages. On the basis of these evidence, this relatively large site with an area of about 6 hectares has been occupied from the Chalcolithic Age to the Early Bronze Age, and after a gap in the Iron Age. The Early Bronze Age ceramics in Doranabad indicate the characteristics of the Kura-Aras pottery. Therefore, it seems that the Kura-Araxes populations had arrived in the south of Qazvin Plain at the beginning of 3rd millennium BC, and settled in the sites like Doranabad. The presence of Kura-Araxes Culture in the region point out cultural relationships with the northwestern areas, while the Iron Age ceramics in Doranabad are more similar to the pottery of Central Plateau. On the other hand, the polychrome ceramics in the site of Sagzabad are frequently dated to the Late Bronze Age (Azizi Kharanagh *et al.* 2010-2011), which has considerable similarities with Iron Age pottery in the region. As well, there was a significant Iron Age settlement at Sagzabad

with a large cemetery around it, which has spread to the neighbor site of Ghabrestan. In addition, Yass Tepe is another large site at the region that reveals important evidence from the Iron and Bronze Ages (Tahan and Naghshineh 2016).

Therefore, numerous evidence from Doranabad and other sites in the south of Qazvin Plain obviously confirms the presence of Bronze Age communities in different Phases of this period, which has important cultural relationships with simultaneous communities in the northwest and the central plateau of Iran. Considering these sites have been also occupied in the Iron Age, it seems that there was no significant change in the settlement pattern from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in the region, and the same large Bronze Age sites remained the main Iron Age sites. In this regard, some opinions on the existence of gap in the cultural sequence of the region, especially in the Bronze Age, need to be seriously reconsidered because the available evidence emphasizes the cultural continuity in the south of Qazvin Plain from the early Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

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