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Tappeh Valiki: A Pottery Neolithic Site in the Neka Plain, Mazandaran, Iran

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Abstract

Eastern Mazandaran, a part of the larger southeastern Caspian region, assumed a distinctly important place in the Neolithic period. The region shows both a local Neolithic culture and trans-regional ties to the coeval cultures of Gorgan, Semnan, Damghan, and Shahrood plains, northeastern Iran, and southern Turkmenistan. In recent years, new, systematic excavations have covered the Neolithic sites in the plains of Behshahr and Neka, most notably Touq Tappeh and Tappeh Valiki. The latter, excavated in 2021 to demarcate its boundaries, is one of the largest Neolithic sites across the Neka plain. In this paper the archaeological site of Valiki is introduced and its small finds, in particular the pottery assemblage, are described. Representing the earliest phases of pottery production in the concerned plains, this assemblage evinces a local tradition of pottery technology in the Neolithic period in eastern Mazandaran, on the one hand, and regional and trans-regional contacts, on the other. A preliminary outline of the Neolithic settlement pattern in the involved plains is also given.

Keywords: Neolithic, Eastern Mazandaran, South-Eastern of Caspian Sea, Tappeh Valiki.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

The plain of Behshahr and Neka, also known as the lowland plains of the southeastern Caspian Sea (Figure. 1), are important for prehistoric research. They are bounded by the plains of the midlands and highlands of Central Alborz to the south and the Gorgan plain to the east. For this reason, they are considered important areas in terms of cultural interactions in prehistoric times. Transgressions and regressions of the Caspian Sea in the northern parts of these plains have also given a special feature to their prehistoric settlement pattern (Mamedov 1997; Yanina 2014; Arsalanov *et al*. 2015; Bezrodnykh *et al.* 2016).

Archaeological excavations and surface surveys in these plains have indicated that human occupations trace their history back to the Mesolithic/Epi-Paleolithic period. Excavations at the caves of Hotu and Kamarband (Belt) (Coon 1951), Al-Tappeh (McBurney 1964), and Komishan (Vahdati Nasab 2009; Vahdati Nasab *et al*. 2011), Tappeh Abbasi Khansar (Abbasnejad Seresti, 2009), Gohar Tappeh (Mahforuzi 2003, 2004, 2007; Piller and Mahfroozi 2009), Yaqoot Tappeh (Mahfroozi 2006), Tappeh Terkam Kiasar (Mahfroozi 2010), Qale' Pey in Farim, Sari (Mahfroozi 2009), Komishani Tappeh (Fazeli Nashli 2017) and Touq Tappeh (Abbasnejad Seresti 2020) have provided a sequence of settlements from the middle Epi-Paleolithic to the Iron Age for the region.

Several surface survey projects in the plains have recorded Neolithic sites and settlements (Mahforozi 2001; Mousavi Koohpar 2007; Ramazanpour, 2012; Ramazanpour *et al*. 2014). It was in the course of these projects that Tappeh Valiki was identified in the Mehravan Rural District of Neka County, next to the village of Shahab-O-Din (Figures. 2, 3). The archaeological site of Valiki lies 1.5 km north of the

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latter village, 8 km north of Neka and 14.5 km south of the Caspian Sea, with a total area of about 55000 m2. As agricultural activities had seriously damaged the site, a proposal was submitted for demarcation of its boundaries, which was carried out in the summer of 2021 (Nemati Loujandi 2021). The previous investigations have provided an array of artefactual assemblages including pottery and lithic tools from different prehistoric periods, especially the Pottery Neolithic (PN). Valiki entered the National Heritage List on December 17, 2002 as monument no. 7843. Given its importance, a proposal for stratigraphic excavation at the site was submitted to the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute. The proposal was approved and the fieldwork is underway at the moment. Stratigraphic excavation at the site is of great importance, helping to pin down its cultural sequence and relative and absolute chronology, possible presence of Neolithic architecture in the region, the site's role in the Neolithic settlement patterns, its subsistence system, and its level of technological complexity.

Pottery Neolithic at Tappeh Valiki

As part of the fieldwork to demarcate the core and buffer zones of the site, 19 trenches (T1 to T14 and T.A to T.E) were opened. They yielded evidences from the Islamic, historical, and prehistoric periods. In most trenches, Neolithic potteries with local, regional, and trans-regional characteristics were recovered, hinting at the importance of the site in the PN. Therefore, the authors will the recovered pottery assemblage and propose a relative chronology. In general, the local Neolithic pottery bears a thick



Figure. 1: *Location of the Neka and Behshahr Plains in eastern Mazandaran (After: Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2009)*



Figure. 2: *General View and Satellite Images of Tappeh Valiki (After:Google.Earth 2022)*



Figure. 3: *General view of the site, A: view from South, B: View from North, C: view from West, D: view from East*

cream to red-brown slip, is handmade, and contains chaff temper (Figure. 4).

Robert Dyson (1991) was the first scholar to study the pottery assemblages from Hotu and Kamarband caves deriving from Carlton Coon's excavations (1951; 1952) at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Report by Coon himself sadly makes no mention of the ceramics from these caves, and a short description of their various types was published by a member of his team, Frederick R. Matson (Matson 1952). Dyson has distinguished between three horizons based on these pottery assemblages. The earliest horizon is the so-called Caspian Neolithic Soft Ware (CNS) dating to 6610 BCE (Thornton, 2013: 243). Poor firing, handmade manufacturing, chaff temper, and thick and brittle fabric are some of the characteristics Dyson cites for the related pottery. The most common form is deep bowl resembling a beaker, with slightly concave walls and rounded rims. The next horizon is designated as Djeitun-type pottery and dated to 6380 BCE (Harris, 2010: 120). Similarly fired at low temperatures, this pottery is chaff-tempered, coated in thick pinkish-buff slip, and marked with painted simple linear patterns. Dyson defines the latest prehistoric horizon on the basis of the presence of Cheshmeh Ali ware of Sialk II (around 5300–4400 BCE).

These ceramics are characterized by a polished red slip, a thin body, sufficient firing, and finely chopped chaff and sand tempers, and bear painted motifs in black as linear geometric motifs and animal figures. He also introduced such a pottery sequence for Sang-e Chakhmaq in Shahroud as a part of the larger region of Northeast Iran (Thornton 2010). Nevertheless, in their reappraisal of the pottery assemblages of Hotu and Kamarband caves, Michael Gregg and Christopher Thornton failed to spot even a single piece of Djeitun pottery. While the pieces of CNS with cream bronze slip and black patterns occur, the patterns themselves (for example, zigzag lines) contrast with those attested at Djeitun (Masson 1957; 1972; Harris 2010) and other sites associated with the Djeitun culture in northeastern Iran (Gregg and Thornton 2012).

Through molecular analyses of Hotu-Kamarband CNS potteries, Gregg and Slater (2012, 1782) identified evidence of milk fatty acid residues, an observation apparently pointing to livestock raising. However, no reliable evidence on the presence

of domesticated species in this region is at hand at present (Asadi Ojaei and Abbasnejad Seresti 2019). The Neolithic pottery in the Tappeh Valiki assemblage roughly falls into three groups: local, regional, and trans-regional. The first, local, group has a structure similar to the Hotu-Kamarband CNS, except that certain patterns are present in the form of horizontal ladders on the exterior rims and a thin band of paint occurs on the interior. This pottery type was recovered in large quantities in the stratigraphic excavation of Touq Tappeh (Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020), some 5 km to the west (Figure. 5).

The second group, regional pottery, is the same as Hotu-Kamarband CNS potteries, which are decorated with red-brown to black and pink geometric patterns. Unfortunately, only a handful of photos are available from the Hotu-Kamarband CNS, almost all of which have been obtained from the personal archives of archaeologists (Figure. 6). Of this group we can mention a piece with bulge on its body. While reviewing the pottery assemblage from Qale' Pey's, a site in the highlands of Dodangeh, Sari, about 80 km from Valiki, as part of a program



Figure. 4: *: Caspian Neolithic Soft Were from Hotu and Kamarband (Belt) Caves (After:Penn Museum Archive)*

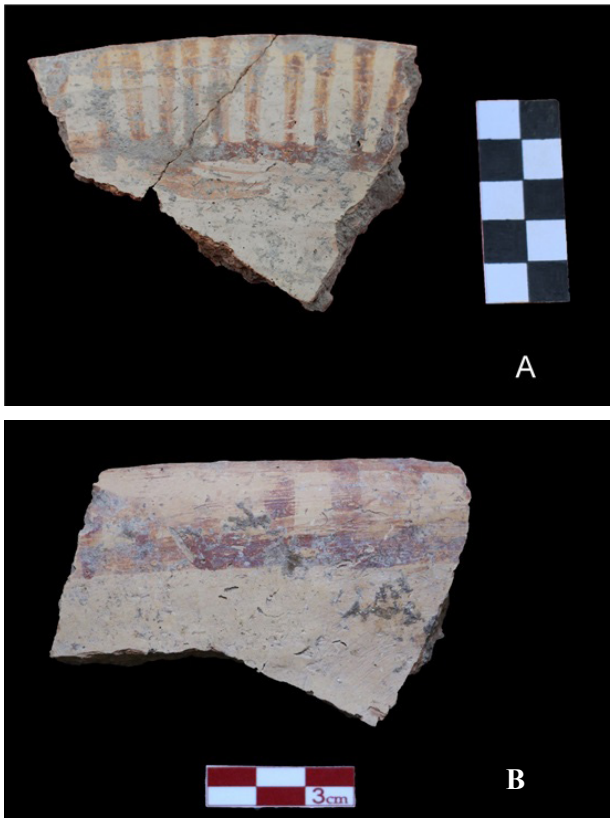


Figure. 5: *Group 1 (Local pottery):*
A*: Tappeh Valiki (After: Nemati Loujandi, 2021).*
B: *Touq Tappeh (After: Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020).*

for surveying Neolithic settlements in Eastern Mazandaran, a similar fragment was encountered (Asadi Ojaei 2021). Further discussions on possible connections between the plains and highlands in the Neolithic period is contingent on the discovery of further evidence in future.

The third group is probably of the Djeitun-Eastern Sang-e Chakhmaq type, which is known from northeastern Iran, especially the Gorgan plain, at such sites as Pokerdwal and Aq Tappeh, and is described as pottery with shady motives (Zeighami 2009: 101; Roustaei *et al*. 2015: 588, Figure. 10). It is noteworthy that in earlier publications these and similar pottery types have been introduced as pottery with "disappearing motifs" (Malek Shahmirzadi and Nokandeh, 2000: 195, Figure. 3). Another fragment that is considered as a trans-regional type is a rim fragment bearing red-brown checkered patterns on an orange slip (Figure. 7). Similar patterns reportedly come from Eastern Sang-e Chakhmaq (Roustaei *et al*. 2015: 588, Figure. 10) and Djeitun (Coolidge, 2005).

Another distinct pottery type at Valiki concerns

a series of miniature, very shallow pieces. They are black in color, bear a polished slip, and contain mineral temper. A similar type has been excavated at Touq Tappeh (Figure. 8). While their use in color making appears plausible, attributing any specific function to them is impossible at the moment. Several pieces of these potteries have been collected for experiment. Another notable category is a red-painted pottery type (Figure. 9). This pottery, which is regarded a Chalcolithic hallmark in eastern Mazandaran, is rather rare and corresponds to the third type in Dyson's classification of the Hotu and Kamarband assemblages in Philadelphia. Such meager Chalcolithic deposit is also suggested by Touq' pottery assemblage.

The pottery was possibly manufactured locally at Valiki. A circumstantial corroborative evidence comes from the discovery of a stone artifact, a borer, used to smooth the surface of pottery vessels (Figure. 10), an excavated example of which comes from Touq. However, the lack of evidence on any pottery workshops prevents any further conclusions in this regard. While the interior and exterior slips on Valiki potteries is thin, they probably were not durable because of the poor quality of the slip and the calcareous soil of the region. Only thick slips have survived. In terms of average thickness, the coeval pottery tends to measure between 1 and 1.5 cm thick. Another interesting point about the technology of these potteries is their temper. Along with chaff, other combined tempers such as chaff-mineral, mineral-shell, and chaff-shell are attested (Figures. 11-13; Table 1). These different combinations attest to the technological complexity as well as the potters' ingenuity, which can be considered as a characteristic of ranked societies. A methodical study of these potteries along with absolute and relative dating of the related strata and contexts will enhance our understanding of technological advances of these societies.



Figure. 6: *Group 2 (Regional pottery): A , B: Tappeh Valiki (After: Nemati Loujandi, 2021).*
C: Touq Tappeh (After: Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020).
D: Qale' Pey (After: Asadi Ojaie, 2021).

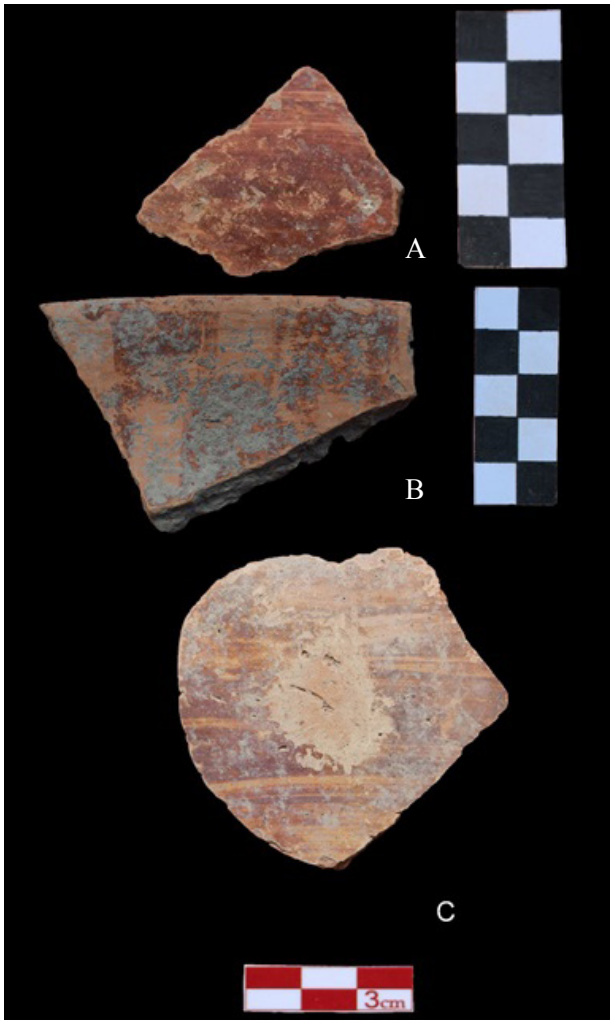


Figure. 7: *Groupe 3 (Inter-regional pottery):*
A, ***B****: Tappeh Valiki (After:Nemati Loujandi, 2021).*
C*: Touq Tappeh (After:Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020).*



Figure. 8: *Miniatures pottery pieces from Tappeh Valiki (After:Nemati Loujandi, 2021).*

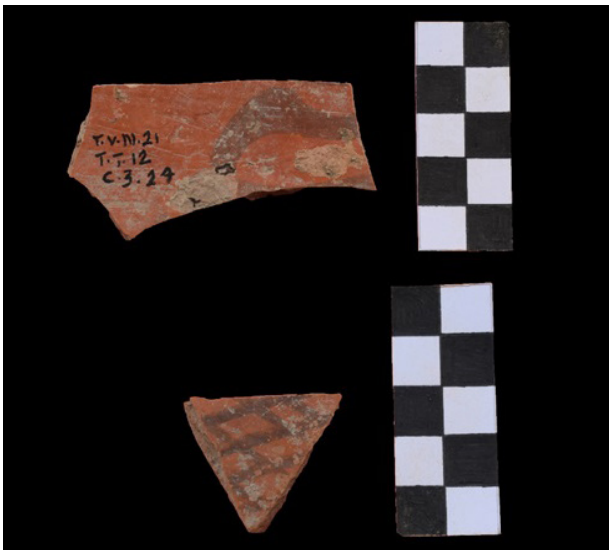


Figure. 9: *Black-on-Red pottery fromTappeh Valiki (After: Nemati Loujandi, 2021)*



Figure. 10: *Stone object, probably used for smoothing pottery surface, from Tappeh Valiki (After:Nemati Loujandi, 2021).*

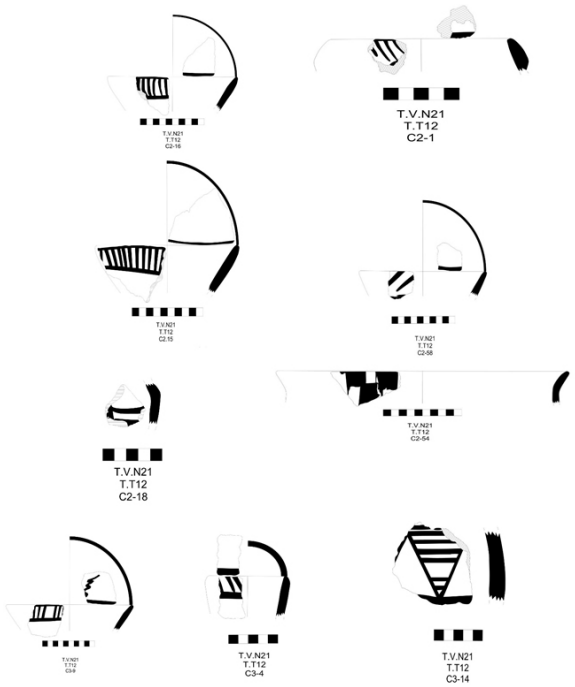


Figure. 11: *Neolithic pottery from Tappeh Valiki*

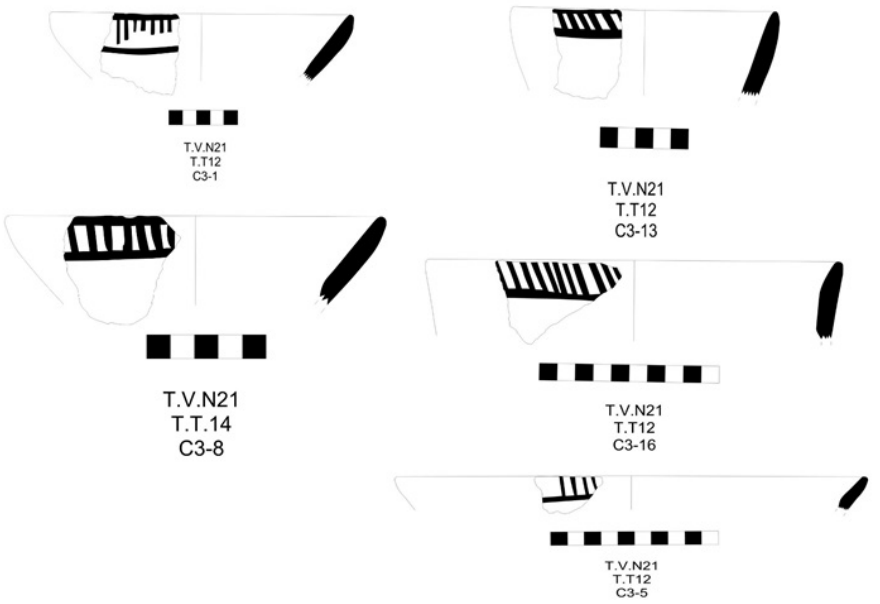


Figure. 12: *Neolithic pottery of Tappeh Valiki*

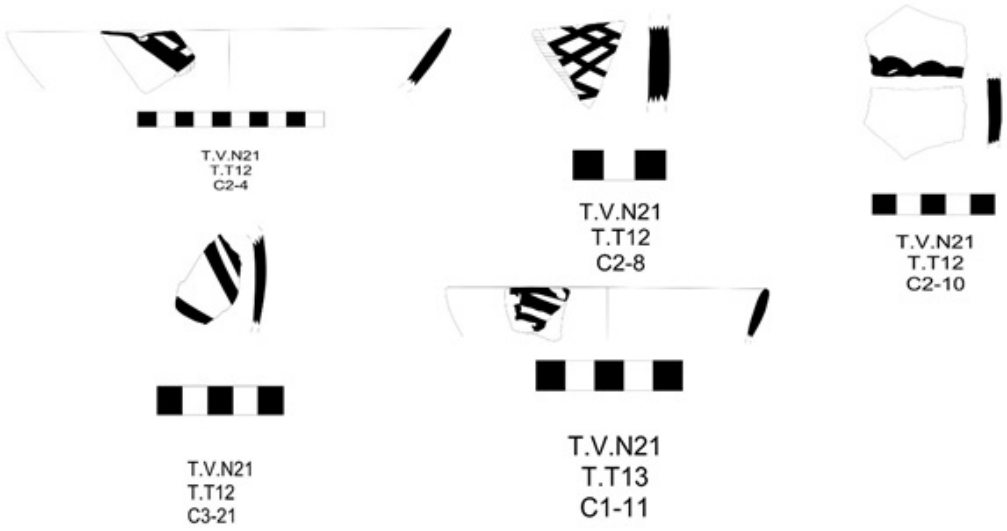


Figure. 13: *Chalcolithic pottery from Tappeh Valiki*

Spatial Pattern at Tappeh Valiki

While a precise reconstruction of the settlement type for the site is hindered by the small size of the excavated trenches, in light of the excavation at Touq (Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020) and the recent excavation at Hotu (Fazeli Nashli, 2021) a general pattern can be deduced for the site and perhaps the region. Of the 19 trenches excavated at Valiki in this season, Trenches 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 were completed in the central part of the site, where most Neolithic artifacts have been recovered. The remaining trenches were opened around the site. All trenches measured 1.5 × 1.5 m. The southern part of the site produced no Neolithic evidence and most of the collected pottery from this quarter date to the Islamic and historical periods. Trenches 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 14 reached virgin soil at the depths of 40 cm, 60 cm, 160 cm, 80 cm, 190 cm, 100 cm, 90 cm, respectively. Excavations at Trench 12 stopped at a depth of 140 cm, before reaching virgin soil (Figure. 2).

It should be noted that all of these trenches are located in the central mound and were taken down to different depths, some of them not very deep. This highlights two points: Firstly, the abundance of evidence shows that the Neolithic settlement

Table. 1: *Specifications of pottery from Tappeh Valiki, presented in Figures. 10-12*

Fragment No.[1]	Making Method	Temper	Firing Quality	Porosity	Inside-Outside slip	Decoration	Period
TT. 12; C. 2; F. 1	Handmade	Chaff	Medium	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C. 2; F. 4	Handmade	Mineral	adequate	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 12; C. 2; F. 8	Handmade	Mineral	adequate	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 10	Handmade	Mineral	adequate	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 16	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 15	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 15	Handmade	Chaff-Mineral	Medium	Medium	Thin-Thin	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 54	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.2; F. 58	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
T.T.12-CON 3-1	Handmade	Chaff	Medium	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C. 3; F. 4	Handmade	Chaff-Mineral	Medium	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C. 3; F. 5	Handmade	Chaff	Medium	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C. 3; F. 9	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.3; F. 13	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.3; F. 14	Handmade	Chaff	poor	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.3; F. 16	Handmade	Chaff-Mineral	Medium	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic
TT. 12; C.3; F. 21	Handmade	Mineral	adequate	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 13; C. 1; F. 11	Handmade	Mineral	adequate	Low	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Chalcolithic
TT. 14; C. 3; F. 8	Handmade	Chaff	Incomplete	High	Thick- Thick	Painted-Geometric	Neolithic

was mainly concentrated in the central part, and the remaining parts, especially the southern and western quarters, were used only in more recent historical and Islamic periods. Therefore, it seems that the Neolithic settlement should be much smaller than the entire site. Secondly, the different depths at which virgin soil was encountered in the trenches indicate that the entire central part of the site was used uniformly, without sticking to a certain settlement pattern. Although none of the trenches produced architectural evidence, in some trenches the cultural layers appeared close to virgin soil and natural strata, which is almost a rare phenomenon in archeological excavations.

The same situation is seen at Touq Tappeh, 5 km to the west of Valiki. At Touq, Trench 2 reached virgin soil, recorded as Context 17, in the western corner of the trench below Context 16 (level 2; 257 to 284 cm). Context 16 continued up to 5 layers with rich material culture. Continuing to the excavation of Contexts 18, 19, and 20 we reached virgin and natural soils with different textures such as sand and swamp which enclosed the cultural layers of the trench in an eastward direction, and finally, virgin soil appeared in context 21 (a cultural context) at a depth of 401 cm while was at the top of context 20 (a virgin layer). These 4 contexts of trench 2 of Touq Tappeh have different virgin layers along with 2 contexts with rich cultural layers along the slope of the grounds which are very similar to some of the trenches in Valiki. However, no architectural evidence related to the Neolithic was recorded at Touq (Abbasnejad Seresti, 2020). Therefore, this site does not show any regular settlement pattern for the Neolithic period. While in Trench 1, in the upper layers, mud-brick architectural evidence related to the Bronze Age is discernible.

Interpretation of settlement patterns at these Neolithic sites in the lowlands of eastern Mazandaran is very difficult based on the few excavations that have been conducted in rather small trenches. Therefore, we are only able to mention the problems and possibilities. PN sites in the plains of

[1]TT: Test Trench; C: Context; F.: Fragment

eastern Mazandaran are small and average between 3 to 6 hectares in area. So far, more than 20 sites of Pottery Neolithic have been found in the plains (Asadi Ojaei, 2021). These small sites, despite sharing similar cultural materials, represent small communities. Since architecture is yet unknown from the excavated sites in the plain (Touq and Valiki), these sites can interpreted as temporary settlements of the mid-7th millennium BCE, whose inhabitants used to build their structures into holes dug into the natural deposits, instead of using building materials. Similar settlements have been reported from Tepe Asiab in the 9th millennium BCE (Braidwood, 1961; Darabi *et al.*, 2018), Tepe Abdul Hussein in the early 7th millennium BCE (Pullar, 1990), and Tepe Sarab (Braidwood *et al*., 1961) in the late 7th millennium BCE in western Iran[1] . Small settlements lacking architecture and storage spaces are incompatible with a sedentary farming society.

The meager Neolithic layers in this region indicate the short duration of occupation of the sites. Coon (1952) states that the thickness of the Neolithic layers at Kamarband is only 30 cm, but Ralph (1955 qt Gregg and Thornton, 2012: 61) reports it between 150–160 cm. The cotemporary strata at Hotu were reported as being almost 1 m thick (Coon, 1952), but in the recent excavation only 25 cm of these layers were excavated (Fazeli Nashli, 1400: 512). At Touq, the thickness is about 2.5 m (Abbasnejad Seresti, 1399) and at Valiki (Trench 11) is about 2 m.

Meanwhile, plant remains from the regional excavations do not indicate the presence of domestic species (Vahdati Nasab *et al*, 2020; Farshi Jalali, 2020; Shirazi, 2018). Therefore, it may be better to leave the question of the presence of permanent agricultural communities open until reliable data is forthcoming and move to the next possibility. These sites might be more suitable for grazing herds and fishing marine species, and were probably occupied temporarily or seasonally. Sites such as Valiki and Touq are located a short distance from the Caspian Sea, and the sea and the local inland lakes and rivers were a very good source of sustenance and food for these communities. The use of Caspian seals and waterfowl, whose evidence was recorded up to Level 5 (PN) at Kamarband and Hotu (Coon, 1952), corroborates the claim. Marine animals and waterfowls are also attested among the faunal remains of the Mesolithic levels at Komishan (Vahdati Nasab *et al*, 2019). Remains of fish spine reportedly likewise occur at Tepe Komishani dating to the Mesolithic and PPN (Fazeli Nashli *et al*., 2017). However, a major shortfall of this possibility is the absence of marine animal remains in the PN layers of the excavated sites in the plain, such as Touq, a fact that leads us to the second possibility.

We had already mentioned that there is a connection between the Neolithic potteries found in the highlands such as Tappeh Sad and Tappeh Qale' Pey and sits like Valiki in the plain. On the other hand, the evidence of using animal products such as milk and dairy has been provided in a series of publications on the basis of molecular experiments of the Neolithic potteries (Gregg and Slater, 2012). Therefore, it can be considered that the settlements in the plains were transient used for seasonal grazing of herds, probably during the cold seasons. These settlements dis not require any type of architecture and it would suffice only to prepare a space that offered temporary accommodation and safety, such as circular buildings reported from the Central Zagros sites such as Tepe Abdul Hussein and Tepe Sarab, which belong to herding communities. Indeed, these Zagrosian sites served functions beyond simple sheltering. Of course, there is the issue of animal keeping spaces, which depend on the flock size. Given the size of the sites, it does not seem to have been very large, however.

The possibilities outlined above about the settlements in the lowlands of the Caspian Sea, especially for sites such as Valiki, require more excavation with larger horizontal exposures. Also, to find the connection between the plains and the highlands in the Neolithic period, targeted excavations are needed at the Neolithic sites in the highlands. To determine the settlement pattern within the Neolithic sites and, at a higher level, in the region, we need to consider the possible architectural evidence and their functions as well as the correlation between the excavated data, including absolute dating, floral and faunal remains, lithic assemblages, pottery, and paleo-climate to gain an understanding of the lifestyles practiced by these Neolithic societies.

Conclusions

While Tappeh Valiki has been significantly disturbed by agricultural and construction activities,

[1]The comparing between the northern Neolithic and Zagros Neolithic is because of their dates that are very close to each other.

the sounding program for the demarcation of its boundaries along with a detailed stratigraphic excavation can play a key role in the study of Neolithization and Neolithic process in the southeastern plains of the Caspian Sea. As animal domestication in eastern Mazandaran still remains almost totally untouched, barring Coon's passing reference to the presence of domesticated species based on the slaughter pattern of goats and sheep in the pre-pottery Neolithic and of pigs and ox during the PN, horizontal excavation at such sites as Valiki and Touq has the potential to shed light on the Neolithization and food production in this region.

The potentials of the plains of Behshahr and Neka regarding the issues pertaining to the Neolithic period are much more beyond what is presently appreciated. Today, fresh archaeological studies have broaden our understanding of the Neolithic settlements, while prior to the 2000s Hotu and Kamarband caves represented the sole Neolithic sites in the region. Concomitant sites on the plains can provide more important data and evidence, especially with respect to subsistence economy and food production methods. As already stated, the PN in the plains of eastern Mazandaran was considered, drawing on the dates presented by Coon, to have been started in the mid-7th millennium BCE, while new dates suggest that it might have occurred at an earlier time. In general, three groups of pottery are distinguishable in the plains of Behshahr and Neka, especially in the excavated assemblages from Touq and Valiki, including local, regional, and trans-regional groups. The first group, so far specific only to the plain sites (Touq and Valiki), differs from the second only in its motifs. The second group is the Hotu-Kamarband CNS, which is available for study only through a few photos taken from the University of Pennsylvania Museum's archives.

The recent surface surveys in the lowlands (plains) and highlands of eastern Mazandaran have identified new sites of particularly a Neolithic date raise questions on the ties between these plains and mountains in terms of pastoral life and communication with the southern flank of Alborz. The third group includes trans-regional pottery, which is paralleled at the assemblages from the sites of the Djeitun-Eastern Sang-e Chakhmaq period and the late 7th millennium BCE. Such pottery also occurs at such sites such as Aq Tappeh and Pokerdwal in the Gorgan plain, and Sang-e Chakhmaq, Tappeh Kalate Khan and Tappeh Deh Kheir in the Shahrood and Semnan plains. Whilst systematic studies in the lowland plains of eastern Mazandaran began in the late 2010s, there are still many open questions and no proper approaches and hypotheses have been used to answer these questions. We need an absolute chronology of the intact layers of these sites. Study of the pottery manufacturing techniques will be of great help in understanding the social complexity and social ranking in these communities. We also need a careful study of the functions served by these potteries and their relationship to the subsistence of the inhabitants of these plains. It should be noted that in the plains of eastern Mazandaran, no PPN site has been reported yet, and the excavation at Touq has ended with the PN. Discovery a site from this period in the plain along with separating the PPN from the caves will furnish extremely important information about the Neolithic process and food production of these communities. Therefore, further excavations such as the stratigraphic excavation of Valiki, which is one of the largest Neolithic sites in the region, can play an important role in finding answers to these questions.

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