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Tall-i Gap, Marv Dasht, Iran

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The excavations

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On the basis of the successful results from the 1956 excavations at Tall-i Bakun A and B, albeit on a small scale, the Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition conducted more extensive field investigations in the Marv Dasht plain in 1959. Several mound sites near Tall-i Bakun, all belonging to the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic periods that the expedition targeted, were excavated in the spring of 1959. Tall-i Gap is one of these sites; it was investigated under the direction of the late Professor Toshihiko Sono (Figs. 1, 2; Egami and Sono 1962; Sono 1967). It represents a group of prehistoric mounds situated about 13 km to the southeast of Tall-i Bakun. It was already identified as a prehistoric site by L. Vanden Berghe during soundings conducted in the early 1950s. More thorough surveys, conducted by the Japanese team, documented at least seven mounds, which were designated as Gap A to G (Fig. 3). Gap A was subjected to the most intensive excavations (Fig. 4). It is a circular plan with a diameter of about 120 m and a height of some 5 m from the surrounding field. The excavations were conducted for about two months from April 20, 1959.

The excavation followed a 10 m by 10 m grid system. Two squares were fully excavated: Square GAI at the highest part, and Square GAII at the southern foot of the mound. These squares were connected by a 3 m-wide and 10 m-long trench, GAT. Square GAI was extended 3 m-wide to the north (GAEI) and the east (GAEII). A number of mud-brick walled rectangular buildings were revealed in these squares, which allowed for the definition of 17 architectural levels for the cultural deposits, which were approximately 6 m thick. However, deep excavations to the virgin soil were only conducted in GAT; in GAI, GAEI, and GAEII, only the top three levels were excavated. The excavations of Square GAII were abandoned after the removal of the thick top soils, leaving the main cultural deposits untouched.



Fig. 1 Map showing the location of Tall-i Gap and related sites in the Marv Dasht plain.



Fig. 2 Distant view of Tall-i Gap.



Fig. 3 Distribution of the seven mounds at Tall-i Gap A (Egami and Sono 1962).



Fig. 4 The Japanese excavation trenches at Tall-i Gap A.

Archaeological finds

In addition to domestic structures like ovens and bins made of clay, the architectural remains included pottery kilns, demonstrating the local production of fine painted wares of the Bakun culture. Another interesting discovery is a square structure made of mud-brick walls, which approximately had a 3 m side and was filled with ashy deposits (Fig. 5). Although the excavators regarded it a "temple," this interpretation remains to be verified with further investigations. The artefactual assemblages associated with the architectural remains consist of a full range of artifact categories expected for the Chalcolithic, including pottery, flaked and ground stone artifacts, bone tools, and copper objects. The most abundant category is pottery (Fig. 4; Nishaki 2003; Miki 2013); detailed analyses established two main phases of pottery for the cultural sequence at this mound: Phase 1 (Levels 17 to 13) and Phase 2 (Levels 12 to 1). The excavators noted a rather gradual transition over these phases, while a layer without standing architecture may have existed in-between (Level 12).



Fig. 5 Excavations of the "temple" at Tall-i Gap A (Egami and Sono 1962).

Contributions to Chalcolithic chronology

The radiocarbon dates available for this sequence are as follows. Level 17: 5870 ± 170 BP (Gak-197) and 5810 ± 50 BP (IAAA-110031) Level 6: 5540 ± 120 BP (Gak-198)

Level 5b: 5670±50 BP (IAAA-110030)

The Gak series were obtained in the 1960s with a Beta counting dating system, while the IAAA series were obtained with an AMS method for the charcoal samples stored at the University Museum, the University of Tokyo, under the JSPS-sponsored research program headed by the present author and Jean-Denis Vigne in 2006 (see also Chapter for Tall-i Jari A). Despite the large difference in methods, the dates are more or less consistent with each other. On the basis of these results, as well as referring to the comparable data from other sites, the cultural sequence at Tall-i Gap is estimated to span from about 4700 to 4300 cal BC.

The most important contribution of the Tall-i Gap excavations is the establishment of a chronology for the middle parts of the Chalcolithic period in southwest Iran. This period is represented by the Bakun culture, which has been conventionally divided into Early, Middle, and Late Bakun. The Tall-i Gap sequence represents one of the best examples for the Middle Bakun, to which other sites in the Fars province are always referenced (Fig. 6; Nishiaki et al. 2018). The meticulous stratigraphic records, to be much appreciated for the time of fieldwork, retain great potential for further research. A future study of the entire material records, not only the pottery specimens, would make an important contribution to understanding the cultural dynamics over this important period of social change.* *The text is after Nishiaki 2020.



Fig. 6 Bakun pottery in situ from Tall-i Gap A (GPA. P65, Level 1) (Nishiaki 2003).

Further reading

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