

The Expedition to the Behbahan Region

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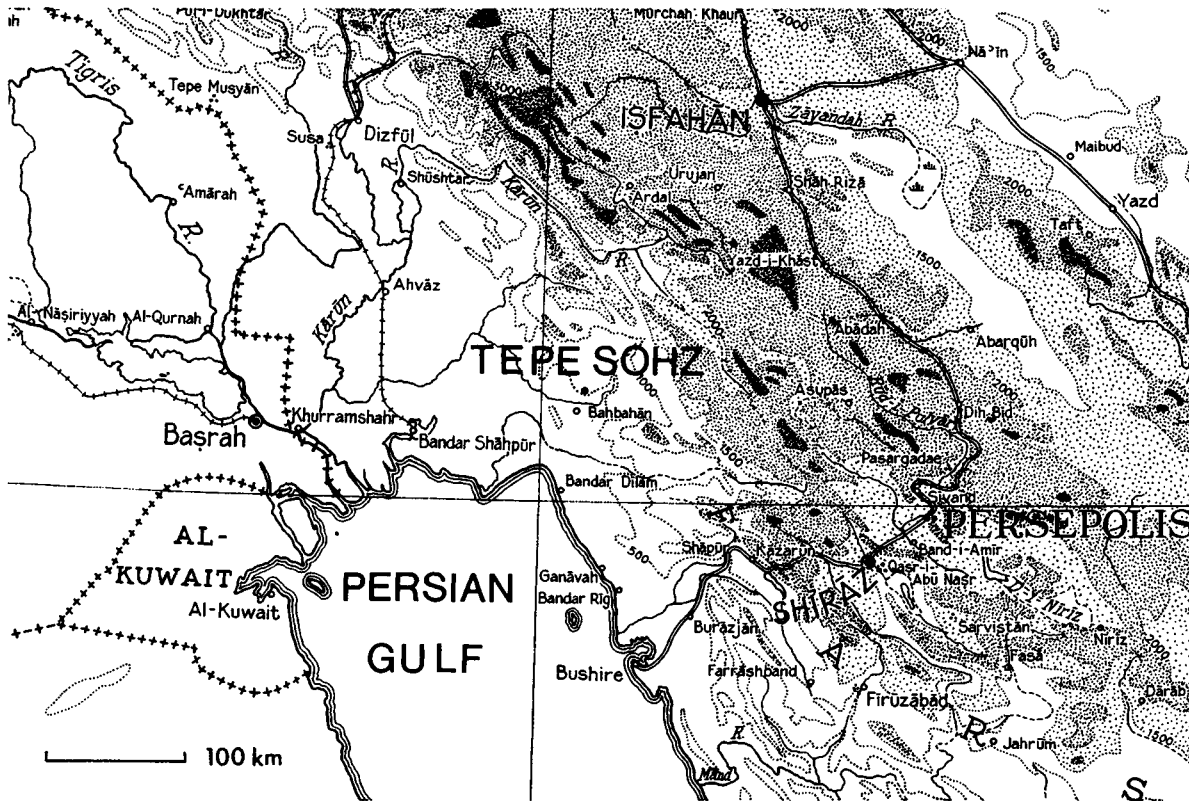
In the spring of 1970 a two-man expedition consisting of the director and Mr. Charles L. Redman, a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago, went to Iran to explore the possibilities of starting an excavation that might lead to solutions of two main problems:

1. Whenever there is a large settlement with small settlements close by, there exists a special relationship or interdependence between the two types of settlement: the small ones depend on the large one for such services as central administration, central storage capacities, and specialized crafts. The large settlement depends on smaller ones for customers for the central institutions, for additional manpower potential, and to supply additional food. Because of the exclusive presence of the central services in the large settlement, however, we can assume that the structure of social relationships within the large settlement differs from that within the small settlements. By comparing the results of archeological investigations into the social structure of each type, we should be able to form ideas about the nature and the degree of interaction between the settlements and about the nature of the central services of the large settlement. Furthermore, since the intention was to concentrate on prehistoric sites, it was hoped that our investigations would give some idea of what specific central institutions may have given rise to a particular large settlement.

2. We know that at least from the seventh millennium onward, distant areas of the Near East were connected by trade relations. So far, however, we can only state the existence of such relations, having no evidence for the mechanics of the exchange. Information on this latter point could be obtained only through an investigation of several settlements along a well-defined trade route. Since nothing normally remains of the actual routes, however, we must approach the problem by considering for excavation areas where a narrow valley forms the only possible connection between two larger cultural areas.

We were looking, therefore, for a prehistoric settlement system (that is, one large and several smaller settlements) located precisely at such a point on an unmistakable trade route. Out of several such areas in Iran our attention was focused on the small intramontane plain of Behbahan in the southeastern corner of Khuzestan. This plain

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General location of Tepe Sohz

is just large enough to support a settlement system and is a part of the only natural connection between Khuzestan proper and the upper plains of Fars, especially the Marv Dasht plain. Both areas were important cultural centers during the late prehistoric periods, as witnessed by the excavations at Susa and Chogha Mish in Central Khuzestan and of Tall i-Bakun and Tall i-Gap in the Marv Dasht plain.

The survey in April, 1970, covered both the Behbahan plain and the adjoining Lower Zuhreh valley. Altogether about 100 sites were found in the two areas, their size ranging from 15 ha to less than 1 ha. They proved to be distributed very unevenly through time. The two main occupation periods are separated from each other by approximately 5000 years, during which there were very few settlements. The earlier of these periods dates to late prehistoric times, mainly the Susa A period (*ca.* 3500 B.C.), during the later part of which all settlements were abandoned. The two surveyed areas yielded a settlement system each, consisting in both cases of one rather large town, 13 and 15 ha, and several smaller ones, 9 in the Behbahan plain, 10 in the Lower Zuhreh valley. Resettling of both areas on a larger scale did not begin until Sasanian times, reaching its peak during the Islamic Middle Ages, with 52 settlements in the Behbahan plain and 29 in the Lower Zuhreh valley.

The mounds of the earlier settlement system in the Behbahan plain seemed the most promising prospect for further study. Thus, in addition to the surface survey we decided to put some trial trenches into the two larger mounds of the area: the largest, Tepe Sohz, with 13 ha, and Do Tulun. The one day's work at Tepe Sohz yielded valuable information, and although in one trench (A) we reached a depth of almost 3 meters, nothing earlier than Susa A was found; this evidence supports our findings from the survey. Equally interesting was the evidence of a solid platform, at least 3 meters high, which seemed to occupy the center of the mound.

The ideal location of Tepe Sohz in the center of a settlement system and on a well-defined early connecting route, combined with the favorable results of our short sounding, helped us decide to make it the target of a major investigation which in time would include one or several of the nearby small contemporary settlements. During our first season, in the fall, 1970, we hoped to dig a step trench which would give us more information about the deeper layers. We also planned to begin work on a large area operation to eventually uncover the uppermost level over the entire mound. Unfortunately, an excess of red tape kept us in Teheran for almost eight weeks waiting for the excavation

permit. Thus, of the planned 10 weeks there remained two weeks for the actual field work. The crew of seven included, besides students from other universities, Miss Judith A. Franke, the Museum Registrar, and a graduate student at the Oriental Institute, Mr. Allan Zagarell.

We cleared mainly the surface and upper levels of a long strip which will eventually become the step trench, and on the whole we confirmed those features which we had learned something about from the previous soundings. The most important results were that we were able to confirm the existence of the central terrace, to locate its outer edge, and to determine that it was built of mud brick. All other plans, for example, opening larger areas in order to find complete building units, had to be left for the next season, which is scheduled for January, 1972. Since I have accepted an appointment at the Free University of West Berlin, the expedition will become a joint effort of the German Research Foundation, the Oriental Institute, and the Free University of West Berlin.



Tepe Sohz, looking southwest, with the beginnings of our trenches in the center. In the background are the village and plantations of Mansuriya. Photo by J. Fehrmann.