

Introduction

In 1350/1971 an agreement was signed between the Afghan Department of Antiquities of the Ministry of Information and Culture and the Archaeological Expedition of the United States National Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, concerning historical excavations in Afghanistan.¹ According to this agreement, which would run for five years, the expedition was granted the privilege of conducting historical investigations in an extensive area of the provinces of Helmand and Nimruz. In the autumn of that year, the expedition, under the directorship of Dr. William Trousdale, undertook the survey of ruins and the historical sites in the designated region. The author, in the capacity of representative of the Department of Antiquities, also took part in this survey. The expedition's investigation covered the historical sites along the length of the Helmand River from Lashkar Gah to Deshu and Charburjak counties and similarly the historical sites of Sar-o-Tar² and other ruins along the road between Charburjak, Zaranj, and Lashkar Gah. As a result of this survey, the expedition chose two historical areas for excavation: first, the ancient region around the site of Shahr-i Gholghola, often called Sar-o-Tar, and the neighboring historical ruins in the province of Nimruz, and second, the historical site of Tepe Shishagi near the village of Khwaja 'Ali Sehyaka in the province of Helmand. Each of the sites was excavated by the expedition in subsequent years.³

In 1354/1975 in the course of the excavation of Tepe Shishagi and the survey of the surrounding area, the expedition succeeded in finding another historical site in Rudbar, which was called Kona Qala II. The discovery of this new site altered the expedition's previous plans. They set about excavating it with great enthusiasm, and by the end of the season, the excavation was completed.⁴ Each year had one work season of approximately three months in the autumn.

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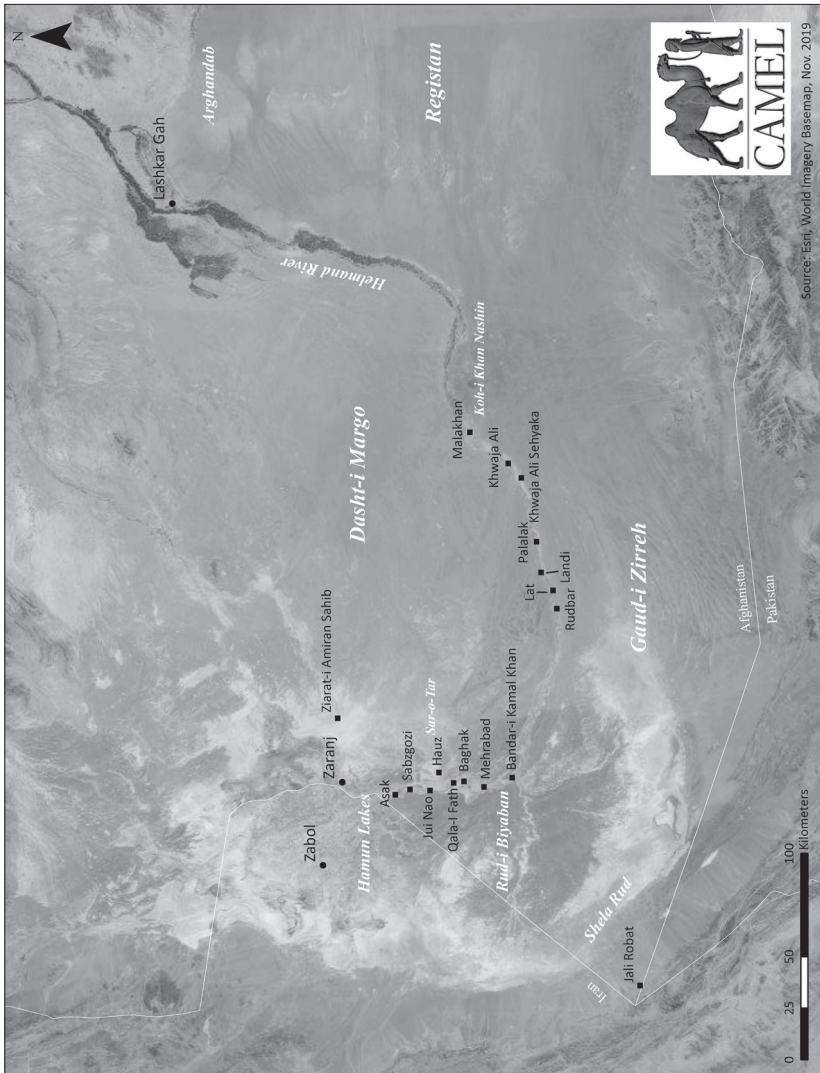
During the first season of survey of the historical sites of that region, the people's lifestyle, the profound differences between the social classes, and their relationships to each other caught my attention. After a few enquiries among farmers and several of the inhabitants of the area, I found that the way of life of the Baluch people in that region—their customs and manners, the type of agriculture, the system of distribution of agricultural produce, and the relation of the landowners to the farmers—differs greatly from that of other regions in the country. Upon further investigation, I came upon more fascinating material that I felt was very important to record. Therefore, I decided that alongside the historical researches, I would also set about collecting sociological data concerning the Baluch people and the inhabitants of Afghan Sistan.

Unfortunately, by that time, the first field season (1349/1971) was almost over, and I knew that I was very short of time. I could not gather enough necessary information, and this research was left for a future occasion.

Luckily, in 1351/1973 the author was again assigned to the expedition as archaeological representative and took part in the digging. However, during this season, the expedition's research concentrated upon a very specific and limited area of the ancient city of Shahr-i Gholghola (Sar-o-Tar) and its environs. Therefore, it seemed appropriate that I undertake my research on the subject in a more circumscribed area that was easily within my reach.

The area about which I collected material during this time comprised the regions which are completely irrigated by a large canal that separates from the Helmand River in the vicinity of Karudi⁵ and is called the Qala-i Fath Canal. This region, according to information in the Office of Finance there,⁶ contains 42,000 *jeribs*⁷ of agricultural land and includes eighteen villages or hamlets.

In 1352/1974 I again took part in the research with the expedition. In this season, the investigation of the historical site of Shahr-i Gholghola (Sar-o-Tar) and the historical ruins surrounding it took up much of the expedition's time, but approximately one third of the season was devoted to investigation of the historical sites of the northern portion of Sar-o-Tar and inspection of some of the ancient remains on the southern fringes of the Dasht-i Amiran, the historical ruins surrounding Hamun-i Puzak, Lash, Juwain, and Peshawaran. Accordingly, this plan gave me the opportunity not only to continue my research in the areas adjoining the Qala-i Fath Canal and to fill in the existing gaps, but also to extend this investigation to the northern areas of the Helmand Basin.



Map 0.1 Main towns and villages in Afghan Sistan. Map by CAMEL Project, University of Chicago Oriental Institute.

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The expedition's fifth season of archaeological digging, in 1353/1975, was the last season of research according to the agreement. In this season, the expedition looked at some historical remains on the left bank of the Helmand River below Darwishan and on Tepe Shishagi at Khwaja 'Ali Sehyaka, which had been discovered as a result of the team's 1349/1971 survey. The Baluch people call *tikar* (clay pottery) *shisha*. Since many lumps of broken clay pottery can be seen on top of the hill, they gave it this name.⁸ The excavation there took five weeks. Another five weeks of this season were spent in the excavation of the tepe Kona Qala II in Rudbar.

As a result of the plan of the investigations of the fifth season, I came into contact once again with the Baluch people along the length of the Helmand River from Lashkar Gah to Charburjak and Bandar-i Kamal Khan (approximately 150 km from Lashkar Gah),⁹ and I was able to bring to a successful conclusion the research that I had been unable to complete in 1349/1971.

At the end of this season, a research trip was made to Rud-i Biyaban, to a fortress in the southwest corner of Afghanistan, which in that area was the marker of the common border between Fars, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan at the foot of Kuh-i Malik Siyah. The three day trip also included Trakhun, Bandar-i Kamal Khan, Charburjak, and Galudand.¹⁰ As mentioned before, this monograph is comprised of information concerning the daily life of the Baluch and people native to the lower reaches of the Helmand River as far as the Basin and the surrounding areas, making up the present-day Afghan Sistan.

Notes

- 1 The contract was signed at Jalalabad in February 1971. The Helmand Sistan Project began work in September of the same year. The contract was composed by W. Trousdale in consultation with the Afghan Deputy Minister of Information and Culture. The contract was loosely based on one recently concluded with a German archaeological mission, but a month of negotiations was still required to develop a document acceptable to both parties. Subsequent to the signing ceremony at Jalalabad (noted on the front page of *The Kabul Times*, 1 March 1971), the government of Prime Minister Nur Ahmad Etemadi fell and all pending unratified contracts were subject to review and approval by a new Council of Ministers. The contract was

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approved by the Council in September and a Royal *firman* (decree) issued shortly thereafter. Subsequent changes in government, including establishment of the Republic in 1973, did not affect the operation of the mission. WBT

- 2 This toponym appears first in Western literature (as Sarotar) in McMahon 1906, p. 219f, where it is applied to the extensive ruins of the archaeological site of Shahr-i Gholghola. It next appears (as Sarotār) in Tate (1909) where it refers to a broad geographical area of ruin fields in Afghan Sistan, of which Shahr-i Gholghola is the southernmost complex, but the same author (1910–1912) erroneously limits this name to the ruins of Shahr-i Gholghola. In the brief report of the French mission to Afghan Sistan from mid-October to mid-November 1936, the term Tar-o-Sar is applied exclusively to the Shahr-i Gholghola ruins (Hackin 1959). Fairservis (1961, p. 20f.) seems to use the term in both senses, but on p. 52 refers to Shahr-i Gholghola as Sar-o-Tar and employs the toponym Ghulghula in reference to a concentration of ruins farther north. Fairservis did not visit sites in the sanded tract. If there is a correct application for the toponym, there is no correct form for it: Sar-o-Tar, Tar-o-Sar, even Sar-o-Sar are in current use. It refers not to Shahr-i Gholghola, but to the entire sand-covered portion of the eastern Basin where ruins occur. It is bounded on the north by the district of Chakhansur and the Dasht-i Amiran, on the east by the Dasht-i Margo, on the south by the Dasht-i Jahanum, and on the west by the sometimes cultivated lands along the right bank of the Helmand River. The term is evidently Baluchi and means, insofar as we were able to elicit a concise meaning, “emptiness and desolation.” In this sense, the order hardly matters.

Toponyms expressive of such bleakness exist elsewhere in the greater Sistan region; Conolly (1838, p. 713) cites a tract of land to the north of the Sistan *hamuns* then known by the name “Tug-i-Noomed,” which he translates as “Waste of Despair.” WBT

- 3 In 1971, archaeological and geomorphological surveys were conducted in the vicinity of Bust (at sites ancillary to this urban complex), in the Helmand Valley between Kuh-i Khan Neshin and the village of Deshu, and in the vicinity of Shahr-i Gholghola in the Sar-o-Tar area of the Sistan Basin to the east of the lower Helmand. Between 1972 and 1974, major efforts were confined to the Sar-o-Tar region. In 1975, excavations were conducted at two major sites on the left bank of the Helmand: Tepe Shishagi at Khwaja ‘Ali Sehyaka and further west at Kona Qala II, in the Lat district of Rudbar, called Lat Qal’a in the *Archaeological Gazetteer of Afghanistan* (Ball 2019, site 687). Additional surveys were conducted in 1975 and 1976 in the regions of the Gaud-i Zirreh, the Shela Rud, and the Rud-i Biyaban. During 1976 and 1977 additional surveys were conducted in bordering districts of Baluchistan in Pakistan and Iran. WBT. Our archaeological findings in Sistan will be described in the archaeological report of the Helmand Sistan Project still in development for publication in 2021. MA
- 4 In the records of the archaeological mission this site is recorded as Kona Qala II to distinguish it from another site of the same name near Deshu. Time

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permitted the opening of only two exploratory trenches at Kona Qala II. It is the most substantial multi-period site we encountered in the five seasons of work. Unfortunately, virgin soil was not reached in either trench before the close of the season. Neither funds nor the expired contract permitted further work at this extremely important site. WBT

- 5 The point on the right bank of the Helmand River, north of Charburjak, where the Qala-i Fath Canal is drawn from the River. WBT
- 6 Probably Lashkar Gah, or Kabul. WBT
- 7 See Editors' Foreword for equivalencies of various sorts. MA
- 8 *Tikar* actually means shards, whether of glass or ceramic. This site was entered into the expedition's reports as *Sehyak* (Seh.), for it lies on elevated ground adjacent to the present village of this name. The site was known locally not only as *Tikar*, but as *dik*, meaning simply "mound," and as *Shishagi Ghundi*, "pottery mound." This last name appears on the U.S.T.C. Map Series 1501, Edition 1, Sheet NH 41-7, as Šišagi Ghundey. Amiri preferred to call this site Tepe Shishagi. WBT
- 9 The motor road ends several miles south of Darwishan. Below this point there is only a motorable track of reasonable quality in most places, except between the Bagat villages to the east and Malakhan to the west of Kuh-i Khan Neshin. WBT
- 10 The survey route was from Rudbar across the desert to the Gaud-i Zirreh, up the Shela Rud, and then south to Jali Robat on the Pakistan border. From here we traveled north to Trakhun in the Rud-i Biyaban, visiting several other sites in this dry channel, returning up the Helmand to Rudbar. For "Fars," read Iran; for "Baluchistan," read Pakistan. WBT