

**ARCANE Regional Group 12: Western Iran
First group meeting, 1-3 february 2007, Berlin**

SUMMARY

The first meeting of the Regional Group 12 (Western Iran) of the ARCANE project took place from 1st to 3rd of February, 2007, at the German Archaeological Institute's facilities in Berlin, Germany. The meeting was attended by six group members and four invited guests.

The meeting program was divided into three parts. The first was an introduction of the ARCANE working principles and guidelines. This was discussed at length, including the implications of these working rules for the study of the western Iranian material. The database was also introduced, and a trial run served to find possible problems to be discussed and explained on the spot.

The second, largest part of the meeting was devoted to a presentation of the material evidence at the basis of the ARCANE project. Due to the specific historical-political situation of the country, there has been only limited fieldwork over the last 30 years, and the project will have to rely mostly on pre-1979 evidence. The major sites were presented in detail and evaluated for their relevance in the ARCANE project.

Finally, a working plan and time schedule was discussed. Each group member was assigned responsibilities for the registering of specific sites, and will proceed with the registering of those sites on the stand-alone database files so that by the end of 2007, the database entry should be completed.

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

A. Participants

Six of the eight permanent members of the ARCANE Regional Group 12 (Western Iran) and four of the seven invited guests attended the meeting; one member and one guest contributed through extensive presentations, so that we were able to cover the complete working program.

This was the first official meeting of the ARCANE RG 12. The meeting therefore began with a personal introduction of all group members and guests, who had formerly mainly corresponded electronically.

One important result of the meeting was that two guests (Bruno Overlaet, Jacob Dahl) were invited and agreed to join the Western Iran RG as permanent members.

B. The ARCANE Project

B1: Presentation of the Project

One important aim of the meeting was to familiarize all group members and guests with the history, structure and guidelines of the ARCANE Project from the initial initiative in 2002 until the official inauguration in February 2006. The aims, purposes and principles of the work were defined and presented (relying on the ARCANE Project presentation by M. Lebeau, E. Rova and J.-P-Thalman available on the project's website). The major tool of the project, the integrated database system, was introduced and a trial run should ensure that everybody knows how to work with the database.

Chronological precision is the basis for any kind of historical study, both at the small-scale local or regional level, and at the larger, intra-regional level. At the heart of the ARCANE Project (Associated regional chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean) lies the necessity to establish a secure chronological framework for the 3rd mill. BC, roughly equivalent to the Early Bronze Age in most of the covered regions, and thus including crucial innovations such as the beginning of writing and the emergence of the first territorial states. Archaeological research relies on various sources for the establishing of a secure chronological framework, including stratigraphic sequences, historical texts and absolute scientific dating. Traditionally, the first historically fixed chronological sequences derive from those areas where writing began first, that is, Egypt and Mesopotamia. To these, sequences established from the neighboring regions were linked. During the last decades, however, the research situation has changed significantly due to several causes. First, fieldwork in the old “core areas” that could have provided new data for further precision was largely prevented by political circumstances. Second, and partly a result of the obstacles against further fieldwork in the core regions, fieldwork in regions that originally have been considered dependent on the core regions has allowed the definition of independent sequences. Third, while a revision of established sequences in the core areas proves impossible, continuing study of available historical evidence has altered our understanding of the traditional chronologies. The main idea of the ARCANE Project is that an attempt should be made at linking together the newly available regional sequences, and to tie these in with the established data series only after a critical revision of the evidence from older excavations that were carried out with a lesser degree of precision than is desirable today. To this effect, regional working groups should in the first step evaluate and revise regional chronological sequences, and only then should, in a second step, these regional sequences be combined. In order to secure the success of this task, a rigorous methodology shall be applied that relies exclusively and selectively on reliable and precise contexts and their find assemblages. Those shall be fed into a database system, which will become one of the major tools of the project.

B2: Status or research and data available to the Western Iran study group

In order to evaluate the possibilities and limitations that the Western Iran Regional Group would encounter in applying the ARCANE guidelines and procedures to the study of the region, each participant had been asked to present the research situation at one or more archaeological site(s) to the working group.

1. Fars, Tal-e Malyan: John Alden introduced the current status of research of the American excavations at Tal-e Malyan with regard to the 3rd mill. BC. The site was occupied at the beginning of the period relevant to the ARCANE project, which would be the Middle Banesh period, and again in the Kaftari occupation towards the end of the 3rd mill. BC which also still falls into the timespan considered here. Including the Malyan evidence into the ARCANE project is possible, but there are some obstacles to be overcome first. One important problem is that the study of the material was never completed and some of the material has been lost after 1979. Hassan Fazeli promised to find out whether more Malyan material is stored in the Iran National Museum and if yes, could be made available for study.

To include the Malyan evidence into the ARCANE project requires some important studies to be completed first: a – a complete typology of the Banesh period pottery needs to be defined, the published evidence is not sufficient to include the material into ARCANE. b - the internal correlation of the separate excavation areas ABC and TUV. Regarding the problem of interval between the Banesh and the Kaftari, there seems to be some evidence from square H5 of the GHI Operation, and from the 2004 H1s sounding. The Kaftari period proper can be studied on the basis of the GHI operation and two 10 x 10 test excavations (FX106 and GGX98) with well-preserved Kaftari architecture; the upper levels of the ABC Operation (the so-called Kaftari Trash) yielded over two meters of stratified Kaftari era midden debris and a large number of wells or deep pits

originated from different surfaces within the Kaftari Trash. John Alden is confident that it will be possible to include the relevant material and documentation into the ARCANE study.

2. Fars, Mamasani Project - Tappe Nurabad and Tol es-Spid: Dan Potts provided a presentation discussing the new data available from two field seasons of joint Iranian – Australian excavation in Tappe Nurabad and Tol-e Spid. Both sites offer long and well controlled stratigraphic sequences and radiocarbon based dating for the early 3rd (Banesh period) and the late 3rd (Kaftari period) mill. BC, but underline at the same time the reality of a hiatus of 500 years or more between these two periods. The data will provide a very good contribution to the ARCANE project.

3. Esfahan, Arisman: Barbara Helwing presented the results of the new Iranian –German excavations at Arisman, where ample evidence for metallurgy dating from the late 4th and early 3rd mill. BC was uncovered. For ARCANE purposes, a domestic houses area of the Proto-Elamite period in area C, grave contexts of the later Proto-Elamite period excavated in the same area, and metallurgical workshops of the early 3rd mill. BC located outside the settlement area are available for study. A radiocarbon date sequence has been established as well.

4. The Lorestan graveyards: Ernie Haerinck and Bruno Overlaet introduced the results of their study and publication project of the Lorestan graveyards excavated during the 1960s-70s by L. Vanden Berghe with regard to the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age. Relevant sites are especially Kalleh Nisar and Bani Surmah, but also the Kunji Cave graves should be included. The Lorestan graves allow a fine-grained definition of a chronological sequence and of regional groups. One problem concerning the large grave types such as dolmen is the long period of their usage with subsequent burials, so that despite good contexts in some cases a long occupation sequence must be considered.

5. Hamedan, Godin Tappe: Mitchell Rothman, who is in charge of the current re-study and publication project of the Canadian excavations at Godin Tappe provided a presentation detailing the evidence. Despite some rush in the original fieldwork and subsequent lacunae in documentation noted during his work, there are good quality contexts available to cover the various subphases of Early Bronze Age period IV and of period III. The Godin re-study project hopes to provide new data in the very near future that will also provide a new basis for absolute dating for early period IV for which no absolute dating is available yet. A re-calibration of the old radiocarbon dates and, if possible, new data are necessary since in comparison with the other sites discussed, the Godin absolute dating seems to be several centuries to low.

6. West Azarbaijan, Gijlar Tappe, Hasanlu, Geoy Tappe: Stephan Kroll discussed the Early and Middle Bronze Age evidence available for West Azarbaijan, and especially the stratigraphic sequence documented during the Italian excavations at Gijlar Tappe where an 11 m deposit exposed in a step trench on the North slope corresponds to the Early Bronze Age. Excavated contexts consist of a sequence of domestic houses, therefore secure contexts should be available for study and inclusion in the ARCANE project and Stephan Kroll has accepted to contact the Italian excavation director for further details. He also managed to find published evidence for the absolute dating of Geoy Tappe K (1 date) and Yanik Tappe (6 dates) that may be useful for recalibration.

7. West Azarbaijan, Haftavan Tappe: Material from the British excavations at Haftavan Tappe is stored in the British Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran and is currently under study by a working group around Karim Alizadeh. The site provides a sequence from the Early Bronze Age to the Sassanian period, and only the two oldest periods VIII (end of EB II) and VII (EB III) are relevant to the ARCANE project. The two periods do not occur in direct superposition but were encountered

in different excavation areas. Solid house contexts have been documented and will allow the definition of key inventories.

8. East Azarbaijan, Yanik Tappe: Roger Matthews assembled the evidence available for the EBA sequence at Yanik Tappe, the Early Transcaucasian key site in East Azarbaijan excavated by Charles Burney and the material studied by Geoffrey Summers. Based on Summers recent article, he concluded that, despite large exposures of building contexts, a consistent phasing of the site's context would be highly difficult. He will try to contact G. Summers for the original thesis content and further information on the material, if possible.

9. Ardabil, Nadir Tappe: Karim Alizadeh presented the sequence obtained from his excavations at Nadir Tappe in Ardabil, where six m of cultural layers dating to the Early Bronze Age could be documented at the base of the mound in two limited soundings. He could define nine levels and related building structures. Although the contexts exposed are very limited in space and the material samples thus very small, the material can provide a useful contribution to the ARCANE project since it derives from a controlled sequence.

10. Qazvin and Tehran Plains survey: The Qazvin and Tehran Plains survey project conducted by Hassan Fazeli includes limited soundings in major sites, from which also radiocarbon samples are taken. He has thus, over the course of the last five years, been able to work out a detailed chronological sequence for the Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age period backed with radiocarbon dating. An important site studied within this project is Tappe Doranabad with evidence for Early Bronze Age occupation. Hassan Fazeli agrees to enter these data into the ARCANE project, where they will provide a most useful basis for the further discussion, and has suggested that he will provide contacts with the respective field directors of the excavations, namely Hamid Reza Valipour for the Tappe Shizar excavations.

Sites discussed, but without detailed presentation

1. Khuzestan, Susa: Unfortunately, Agnes Benoit was not able to attend the meeting and there was thus no detailed presentation of this very key site for Southwestern Iran available. Discussion among the participants led to the conclusion that most of the material from the older excavations at Susa does not satisfy the criteria of quality applied for the ARCANE project. Only the contexts documented during the 1970s excavations at acropole 1 and in ville royale yielded some useful evidence.

2. Fars, Jalyan: The Elamite graveyard at Jalyan was subject to rescue excavations by the Iranian Antiquities Service in the 1960's, and the material stored in Shiraz and Tehran was published by P. de Miroschedji in 1974. No grave inventories can be reconstructed, unfortunately, so that Jalyan will not prove helpful for the ARCANE project. There are, however, several recently excavated graveyards in Khuzestan, due to rescue work along the Karun River, that may provide comparable material. Hassan Fazeli and Karim Alizadeh have agreed to investigate the possibility to include this (so far unpublished) material into the study for ARCANE.

3. Lorestan, Nurabad: Excavations at the Bronze Age site of Tappe Nurabad on behalf of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization proved to be difficult since extensive looting had occurred on the site, so that stratigraphy could not well be established. However, there are several good burial contexts for the 3rd and 2nd mill. BC published that can contribute evidence for the ARCANE project.

Sites not considered within the ARCANE project

Sites left out: due to either bad data quality or to the limited evidence it was decided to leave out the following sites that had originally been included into our list of sites: Farukhabad; Musiyan; Jalyan; Baba Jan V; Tappe Ozbaki; Tappe Guran; Kordlar Tappe.

Sites recently excavated that may be included if the excavation directors agree and if data are available in time

Tappe Qoli Darvish; Pishva; Tappe Giyan (the 1930's excavations cannot be used; recent excavations by the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation). Karim Alizadeh has agreed to make the respective contacts. The DAI has offered to include excavation reports by the respective directors into the Institute's journal "Archäologische Mitteilungen in Iran und Turan" to ensure their publication rights.

Conclusion: Applicability of the ARCANE guidelines to Western Iranian sites

Following the revolution 1979 and the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980's, fieldwork in Iran almost completely ceased until 2000. Some pre-1979 projects remain unpublished, since material was only selectively or not at all available for study. Other projects have proceeded with material studies and publication work, so that a greatly enhanced basis for the ARCANE study is available. Fieldwork by Iranian colleagues has been resumed at a considerable scale since 1997, and since 2000 Iranian and foreign colleagues cooperate in the framework of Joint Research Projects. These yielded considerable new data as well that, if they are available for inclusion in the ARCANE study, will greatly increase our understanding of 3rd mill. BC chronology.

B3: The chronological frame

The period under consideration is the 3rd mill. BC, which in many regions corresponds roughly to the Early Bronze Age. There is, however, some ambivalence regarding the absolute limits for the beginning and the end of the period under study here.

The beginning: At the beginning of the 3rd mill. BC (in absolute terms), Western Iran is stage to three different cultural phenomena, from North to South: the Early Transcaucasian intrusion in Azarbaijan, Hamedan, Kermanshah and the Central provinces; a localized development of painted pottery users with huge burial sites in the Western Zagros mountains of Ilam, Lorestan and Khuzestan, that seems to depend partly on the Deh Loran and Khuzestan developments; and the Proto-Elamite complex existing from Khuzestan/Susa until the highlands of Fars, and to the North until the edge of the Central desert. None of these phenomena begins around 3000 BC sharp, but rather several centuries before the turn of the millennium. They all continue into the 3rd mill. BC, until about 2500 BC. Including the full length of these complexes into ARCANE would have necessitated to begin around 3500 BC in absolute terms. As a maybe not very elegant solution, it was finally decided to begin with the appearance of the first written documents of the Proto-Elamite period, resp. with complexes contemporary to these first texts, thus to leave out the earliest part of the proto-Elamite period that is largely contemporary with Late Uruk.

The end: A major problem in working out a Bronze Age chronological Scheme for Iran lies in the fact that a hiatus seems to have occurred in most sites. Following the Proto-Elamite complex (or the Banesh period), a gap separates the following Elamite period (Kaftari). There seems to be hardly any recognizable occupation after the Early Bronze Age in Lorestan. And at the end of the Early Transcaucasian occurrence in Northwestern Iran, most sites seem to be abandoned. For Southern Iran, it was decided to include at least the beginning of the Kaftari period into the study, especially since the evidence from the Malyan excavations and the Mamasani project provide good evidence. In the North, we will try to include other late 3rd mill. BC complexes, as far as evidence is available.

C. Organisation

Working steps for the first phase of the project should be the analysis of available data and their preparation to include them into the ARCANE database. This requires some organization, and each member of the project assumed responsibility for one or more specific tasks: all excavation participants and directors will be responsible for the preparation and registration of “their” material into the project; others take responsibility of the one or other site whose material and documentation is within their reach; in the case of large sites and large documentations, they will try to include students or postgraduates to help them within the framework of some independent study, or with the help of the database entry budget. Karim Alizadeh has additionally taken up the task to contact his colleagues at the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, to ask them for permission to include theirs data into the project, and Hassan Fazeli as the Director of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research will support him. Karim Alizadeh will also function as the contact point with these colleagues.

By the end of 2007, the database entry will hopefully be complete. This will then serve as a basis for further study during 2008 that should lead to the completion of manuscripts until the end of that year. A second meeting should take place before everybody begins writing, in late spring 2008, to provide an opportunity to discuss the patterns visible then at length among the participants.

Final assessment

The first meeting of the ARCANE Project Regional Working Group 12 (Western Iran) had two major objectives:

One was the introduction of the working principles, procedures and tools to the members of the group. This was discussed at length and in detail. The specific situation in Iran, with only a few excavated sites over a vast territory, and with many important projects either excavated at low standards in the early days of archaeological research, or left incomplete and unpublished due to the political circumstances, makes an application of the ARCANE guidelines on strict evaluation of secure contexts more difficult, but even more necessary. All participants agreed on that.

The second was an evaluation of the available evidence, by discussing the state of research and the quality of data, and by working out a schedule for future work. The responsibilities were distributed and a time schedule for the database entry was agreed upon.

The presentation of the data situation was a first opportunity to see the currently available evidence in an overview. As a result, there are promising assemblages available to the project, especially since the study and analysis of some older project is currently underway and the responsables agreed to put the data at the projects disposal. It has also become quite clear that Western Iran, being one of the largest territories grouped within the project, cannot be treated as one entity, but requires a subdivision into three larger territorial units. We will try to integrate those during our future work.

One encouraging and, in fact, surprising result is the high amount of new work going on since 2000 that provides some good new evidence. The contacts of Hassan Fazeli and Karim Alizadeh will hopefully allow the inclusion of some of this new material into the study. This also shows that the inclusion of more Iranian colleagues active in fieldwork may not only be helpful, but vital to the success of the Regional Group 12 – Western Iran contribution to ARCANE.