



Fig. 1: Satellite map showing location of Tol-e-Bondu



Fig. 2: A view of the Archaeological site of Tol-e-Bondu

The Report of Fourth Season Excavations at Tol-e Bondu and Discovery of a Temple, West of Fars, Iran

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Abstract

This paper underlines the important archaeological evidence unearthed from four seasons of excavation at Tol-e Bondu, located in Rostam-Du,, Noorabad city, Fars province. The most significant information acquired from this excavation is the discovery of a temple from the 16th layer, exactly similar to the one from the middle phase of the Elamite culture. This paper discusses the structures and other features showing similarity between the two regions. Studying the history of the Elamites via relief and inscriptions in Mesopotamia leads us to the belief that performing religious ceremonies played an important role in the civilization and culture of Elam.

Introduction

The specific characteristic of Tol-e-Bondu hill is its location on the way from Fars to Khozestan provinces (Fig. 1). Yagheh Sangar which is located in Rostam -eDu is a natural narrow passageway that makes it possible to come and go in this region. Tol-e-Bondu is one of the historical hills located between this narrow isthmus and a historical bridge, Pol-e-Barim (Fig. 2).

The evidences found in some historical hills in Mamasani prove that this road is situated along the ancient trade route that connected two big provinces, Elamite and Fars with each other. The remains of the paved Achaemenid era royal roads show that this region had a strategic importance.

The main purpose of excavating this site is to find the reciprocal cultural relationship between these two lands and may be the neighboring regions too.

The four seasons of excavations of Tol-e Bondu ended in Jan. 2006. It was started after receiving a sanction from the State Cultural Heritage Organization, by the Islamic Azad University, Kazeroon branch. Whatever is mentioned in this essay is based on the outcome of

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the excavations in this region under the supervision of Mr. Ehsan Yaghmaie (2003-2004) and Miss. Simin Lakpour (Spring and Autumn 2004). The writer was an assistant at the excavation and appreciates their permission for writing this report of the excavation.

The Geographical Position and Ecology of Tol-e Bondu

The Iranian village of Tol- e Bondu is a part of Kupan block (kilometer 35, Noorabad-Mamasani Road, Ghachsaran), that is located in Rostam-Du part, Noorabad city, Fars province (30°, 16' N and 51°, 30' E). The altitude of this region is about 800 meters above sea level.

Nearly 30 years ago this village was located on a small hill where the site is located; however, on March 16, 2000 after the construction of a water canal for taking water from the Sulak river to the north of the hill, the residents of the southern part of the village abandoned the region so that the present Tol- e Bondu village is established at the northern slope of the mount "Dul" and at the margin of the asphalted Noorabad- Gachsaran road . The high quality of soil, abundant water and moderate and misty climate of the region allows the people to have an economy based on agriculture.

Across the present village of Tol-e-Bondu there is a road 600 meter in length. At the end of this unpaved road there is a mound with a height not more than 5-6 meters. In the regional dialect the hill is called "Tol", and hence the site is Tol-e-Bondu. Through the northern part of this small hill water canal has been made. A big portion of the walls of this canal is destroyed every year because of seasonal high flows. Road constructing machines also rummaged the soil from the northern part of the hill at the time of making the canal so that more than one meter of the surface of each trench is full of broken pottery.

Excavation Methodology

After making a topography plan, the surface of the hill was divided into 5m×5m grids. Each grid is named after the English alphabets A, B, C,... from the west to the east and with numbers 1,2,3,... from the north to the south.

Land around the hill has been under the cultivation of wheat and rice for many years. Repeated ploughing and short time rotations have ruined the surface layers of the land so archeological examinations did not give much information. That's why the sidewalls of the canal were the best places to make a surface study in order to measure the length of the hill approximately (from east to west). The quantity of pottery along the wall of the canal from west to east of the hill proves that the actual size of the hill is larger than it seems. In fact a great part of this historical place is under the cultivated land to the east of the hill (Fig. 2).

Chronology of the hill

By the use of vertical excavating method and digging a tentative bore in trenches N13 and M17 based on the existence of the pottery similarity with the ones of Marvdasht in Fars province we can identify four cultural sequence as follow:

1. Bakun culture A5 (Lappui, 3600 BC)
2. Kaftari cultures (2200-1600 BC) and Ghaleh (1800 BC)
3. Middle age Elamite (1800-1400 BC) [and Shogha / Teimoran]
4. New Elamite primary Achaemenids (1st millennium BC?)
5. Achaemenids, Parthian, sassanid & Islamic

The majority of this site belongs to the Elamite middle age.

The Architecture and subsistence pattern in Tol-e Bondu

Information achieved through horizontal excavations in trenches L21, K21, M17 and N20 shows a change from a permanent settlement in 2000 BC to a temporary or a partly temporary settlement in 1000 BC. We have no information regarding the method of architecture from 3000 BC in Tol-e Bondu since the lower layers were not excavated.

As a whole four cultural layers are distinctly seen. Their chronology is mentioned as follows:

1. At the bottom of the collapsed structures in trenches L21, K21 and M17, a row of sun-dried brick was found which indicates to the presence of mud brick architecture through this cultural period. The Pottery found in the same row of the bricks belong to early 2nd millennium BC and has black spots and is very similar to the pottery of Tol-e Ghaleh. In trench M17 while tracing the bricks and removing a pile of dark color soil and rubbish as well as scattered ash and pottery, a mud-brick wall of seven rows became distinct at the bottom of the trench (Locus 3019).

The dimensions of bricks varied from 25×16×18 to 27×17×10 centimeter. The color of the bricks is buff and the direction of the wall is diagonally southeast to northwest with regard to the geographical axis of the hill.

2. A fence built of huge blocks of stones is found and the pottery in this layer mainly belongs to the middle age of Elamite or Teimoran period.
3. A fence built of river stones is built nearly on top of the Elamite fence. Evidences of fire is noticed which is contemporary to this stone fence. These signs are seen in trenches M18, M19 and N20.
4. By the Early 1st millennium BC the settlement pattern suddenly changed to a temporary settlement. In this layer postholes of beams and fire places which were used through seasonal dwelling are seen. The pottery of this layer is similar to the pottery of the Timoorids or later New Elamite based on its appearance.

Religious Architecture

Studying the history of the Elamites via relief and inscriptions in Mesopotamia leads us to conclude that performing religious ceremonies played an important role in the civilization and culture of Elam. Fortunately most of the information acquired at Tol-e Bondu is centered on the religious circumstances in Elamite culture.

Exploring the brick wall (Locus 3019) at the east side of trench M16 and at the north side of trench M16 at a depth of 206 cm the remains of a monument were found.

This monument is rectangular in shape (Locus 3021) with a height of 40 centimeter dug in the ground and the walls are made with straw and mud 15 cm in thickness. All the internal walls are covered with a plaster of clay and straw with a thickness of one or two centimeter. As a whole this structure is a single rectangular shape building of 156×156 centimeters with chamfered angles. The direction of the building is east-west and the entrance doorway is located in the middle of the eastern wall with the width of 45 centimeter.

In the center of this building there is a square platform. This platform is 30×30 centimeters with a height of 40 centimeters made of mud and straw and covered with a plaster of clay and straw. The fingertip impressions of the workers/masons are distinctly visible on it. This platform is located in front of the entrance doorway. The available signs on the ridges of the four walls prove that they were covered with the same material too. On another platform, which is attached to the middle of the western wall and is approximately in the continuous line of the central platform and the entrance doorway, a clay vessel was placed. The height of this platform is about 15 centimeter (the vessel is broken and its shape is changed because of the collapse of the building). The vessel is made of a kind of paste the same as the plaster material of walls in buff color indicating to the fact that they might be made in the same place. Once the debris and soil is removed from the site many broken clay discs with a thickness of 15 centimeter were found. Based on the similarity of the paste of the discs and that of the construction material of the walls and the ridges as well as the central platform it might be possible that there was a bung/stopper for this place to close it when it is necessary. This bung was probably portable and based on the expansion of the building it was made into four separate pieces and they were put beside each other to cover the place. Here it is worthy to mention that the plaster, which covered the entire surfaces of this building was baked by heating gently. A layer of ash was found scattered on the entire surface of the floor and in some parts the thickness of this layer of ash was about 4 centimeter and was even thicker at the inner mouth (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: A single rectangular shape building identified as a Temple with chamfered angles; note in the center of this building a square platform

Excavating within this square structure the authors also found some jaws and bones of different animals (camel, horse? goat and sheep) though the amount of pottery was very limited. Two sherds in buff color and painted with geometrical designs in brown color were found. . Another sherd grey in colour with geometrical patterns in purple was also recovered but it had probably changed its colour due to firing effects. Unfortunately while excavating the trenches near the temple the authors realized that the southeastern part of the temple was destroyed by machinery during the construction of the water canal.

It should be emphasized here that this building was made facing the east from where the sun rises. Also this temple is the first example found within the archeological records and excavations of the Fars region that is comparable to the existing temple at Eridu 16th layer in Mesopotamia.

Economy and Subsistence

Among other interesting objects which were found on this site are baked clay objects including some egg shaped objects, spherical objects and round pottery sherds or discs with holes on them (Token?) and an elegant baked clay seal which points towards some amount of economic activity in the era. A lot of spindle whorls and other weaving instruments were also found.. A sherd of pottery with marks of woven cloth was also found which indicates towards the presence of fine cloth. This piece of pottery was found during a surface exploration and is similar to the pottery of the middle age of Elmites. Based on the presence of scattered bones of domestic animals and the spindles it can be assumed that their economy was based on animal husbandry.

Burial State in Tol-e- Bondu

Among other facts which point towards the the principle of different nations is the way they bury their deceased. Through the four seasons excavation in Tol-e-Bondu were found 8 graves showing three different types of burial practices. states they were buried.

- In trenches E14, M18 and G29, three skeletons were found buried in foetus form.
- In trenches M19, G29 and E14 some scattered bones were found probably representing a secondary burial.
- In trench G22, there are two evidences of infant burials ,one belongs to a newly- born baby who is buried within a grave inside a small cask, and the other belongs to an infant aged less than ten months buried under the floor of a residential room. Only the frontal parts (head and neck) are to be found of this.

Anthropological research shows that in stratified societies like Ghashghaie and Bakhtiari tribes of Iran, children are the beneficiaries of all the material and non-material privileges of their fathers immediately after their birth. So the graves of the babies containing precious objects implies the high economical and social rank of their father, while in primary societies achieving wealth and position depends on personal merit and can be acquired with the passage of time (Alizadeh and Abas, 2004:45). The burial state of these two children may

indicate the social status of the family. Among the graves of Haft Tepe a distinct burial type is reported where a small pottery cask is used as a coffin which is buried in the ground (Negahban, 1993:).

In all these cases special burial vessels are found besides bones of limbs, tibias and jaws of animals like goat and sheep. These vessels are dated to 2000 to 1000 BC. They put a relatively big stone on each grave. The surfaces of the graves were covered densely with small rubbles. Which burials are you referring to all of them mentioned above or the one from Tol-e-Bondu

The belief of life after death is the most important principle of the Elamite doctrines. When a common Elamite person died, he/she was buried under his/her own house without any burial goods plain and without shrouding and even if he/she was a poor, a clay jug was placed in front of his feet with some food and water to be used by the deceased in the life after death. In one of Elamite inscriptions it is mentioned that: "the necessary vessel for his grave is prepared and the stones to cover it are gathered. He goes to face his consequence" (Hins, 1994:78).

Conclusion

Tol-e-Bondu is located within Elamite territory between Susian and Anshan. Fransa Vala defines the word "Elamite" with two meanings: the expanded meaning is the Elamite territory consisting of different regions, among them is Anshan; and the limited meaning is the land of Fars province of today (Vala, 1997:190). The findings of William Summer in Malyan also show the position of Anshan at the west of Marvdasht plain (Summer, which is the last name William or Summer 1974).

Tol-e-Bondu is located on a higher point than the neighboring hills e.g. "Tol-e Rasad" which is about 1000 meter to the west and "Tol-e Kharshotori" about 1000 meter to the east of it. The slope of the hill is such that the temple is constructed at the highest point during the middle age Elamite. Around the temple some pottery, a lot of small animal figurines, some pieces of a skirt and a hat of an Elamite lady's figurine are found. The architecture around the temple shows the presence of dwelling structures of common man. Surely they did not belong to high ranking people and also no luxury vessels or objects were found on the site.

"Nahunteh" is identified as the Sun God of Elamites. he is the creator of the day (Hins, 2004:72). On a bronze plaque which belongs to the second half of 2000 BC an inscription in Akkadian language talks about the "sunrise".

During the spring when the rays of the sun fall on this structure, the entrance doorway, the central platform and the vessel for the storage of liquid all were in the continuous line of rays of the sun. These three elements seem to be the important features in similar temples. Comparing these two temples show us a lot of similarities between the central platform and the bowl shape vessel. Although the temple from the 16th layer of Eridu in Mesopotamia is much older than the one at Tol-e-Bondu, they are very similar in appearance and the concepts of the central platform and the bowl shaped vessel.

In 1946 Seyyed Favad Safar from the antiquity department of Iraq and Stone Lioyd carried out the excavation at Eridu, the historical hill located 20 kilometers southwest of Ur city to reach the virgin soil. The site was excavated in the early 20th century by Compbell Thompson and H. R. Hall. The 18 temples of Eridu are located below or under a part of the later ziggurat at Eridu. The temples of layers 6-18 were constructed during the Obeid period while the others date to different times including the Uruk and Jamdat Nasr periods. Safar divided these temples into three groups, the oldest ones are from the layers 15 to 18 (Safar, 1950).

Amongst the earlier group the most well-preserved temple is, the oldest Eridu temple located in layer 16. The total area of this small temple is about 4 square meters and it is known as the most well-preserved temple in south Mesopotamia. On the northern side there is a niche in the middle of the wall like an altar and a worshipping platform is located in front of it. Another platform is located in the center of the temple which was probably used as a table for donations. The walls have internal supporters and the entrance doorway of the temple is made through the wall across the worshipping platform (Shahmirzadi, 2002:296).

A comparison of the excavated temple in the 16th layer of Eridu with that of the middle age of Elamite in Tol-e-Bondu shows a great deal of similarity between these two small but important buildings. In fact the attached platform in the west side and the central worshipping platform of Tol-eBondu are comparable to the worshipping platform located in front of the altar and the donation table in the center of the 16th Eridu temple. In addition the entrance doorway of the two temples is approximately in the continuous line of the two above mentioned platforms (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Comparison between these two temples show us a lot of similarities between the central platform and the bowl shape vessel. Although the temple of the 16th layer of Eridu in Mesopotamia is much older than this one here, it is very close in appearance with the temple of Tol-e-Bondu.

We know that after the construction of the worshipping platform of the 16th Eridu temple, the style was imitated in other temples in Mesopotamia and it was probably copied by the Elamite too in the construction of their religious architecture.

Another custom or cultural phenomenon which seems to have continued from the Sumerians and deserves to be studied is the practice of burning the donations on the relevant platform. On the donation or offering platform of Eridu temples 16 and 17 the signs of burning activity are observed. A layer of ash with the jaws and teeth of animals scattered on the floor of Tol-e-Bondu temple structure indicates a similar practice as that of Eridu. . Since there is no sign of any burning activity on the platform and walls of Tol-e-Bondu temple but the presence of signs of burning and intense heat put forth by the mound of dust near the entrance doorway indicates that the donations/offerings were probably burned outside and then the ash was transferred scattered inside the temple. Interestingly, also in the temple structure at Tol-eBondu was built within a pit dug in the ground so as to avoid the required support to the exterior walls.

Hence a cultural process and continuity of customs and tradition especially religion which forms the most important aspect of the Elamite culture and the earlier traditions of Mesopotamia indicate towards the continuity of tradition and interaction between the two cultures from different space and time. Religion is one of the most important aspect of the Elamite culture which includes their interest in constructing temples which is repeatedly emphasized and honored by the Elamite kings and commanders show the exchange of cultural traditions between in the southern region of Mesopotamia and Elamite territory so that even the length of time between the construction of these two mentioned temples does not affect the imitation of architectural style at the Elamite temple from the preceding temple in Mesopotamia.

Continuous scientific excavations and analysis at this site of Tol-e-Bondu, may reveal other monuments and artifacts that will help understand the relation between these two separate but similar cultural traditions.

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