

Tepe Bahari: The First Evidence of Aceramic Neolithic Occupation in Kuhdasht County, Lorestan Province, Western Iran

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Introduction

Kuhdasht County is located in the Lorestan Province in the central Zagros region of western Iran at a mean altitude of 1150m above sea level. Lorestan Province has a long history of prehistoric research, which is mainly conducted by non-Iranian scholars (Godard 1931; Schmidt 1938, 1940; Stein 1940; Meldgard *et al.* 1963; Thrane 1965; Young and Smith 1966; Hole and Flannery 1967; Goff 1968, 1971; McBurney 1969, 1970; Mortensen 1974, 1975, 1993; Bewley 1985). Despite this long history of archaeological research, there are still many regions that have not yet been investigated archaeologically. After a long hiatus of archaeological research since the late 1970s, in the last two decades, like in other parts of the Iranian Plateau, archaeological fieldworks resumed in Lorestan Province mainly by Iranian and also the collaboration of non-Iranian researchers (*e.g.*, Roustaei *et al.* 2002, 2004; Moradi 2003, 2006, 2007; Hashemi *et al.* 2006;

Otte *et al.* 2007; Moradi and Bakhtiari 2010; Alibaigi *et al.* 2011; Qobadizadeh and Mohammad Qasrian 2021).

In the winter of 2009 and as part of the Bronze Age archaeological exploration project of Tepe Toubreh Riz in Kuhdasht County of Lorestan Province, an archaeological survey was carried out along the small wadies and valleys of immediate surroundings of the site some 11km south of Kuhdasht city (Fig. 1). The main goal of this survey was to find potential Bronze and Iron Age sites in the vicinity of Tepe Toubreh Riz and also document other archaeological sites. The survey team, under the direction of P. Khadish documented 17 archaeological sites during the survey. One of the interesting finds, however, was Tepe Bahari, a small site with lithic scatters discovered about five kilometers to the southeast of Tepe Toubreh Riz near the modern village of Ganjineh. This short report is the first effort to introduce Tepe Bahari as the only aceramic Neolithic site in this region.

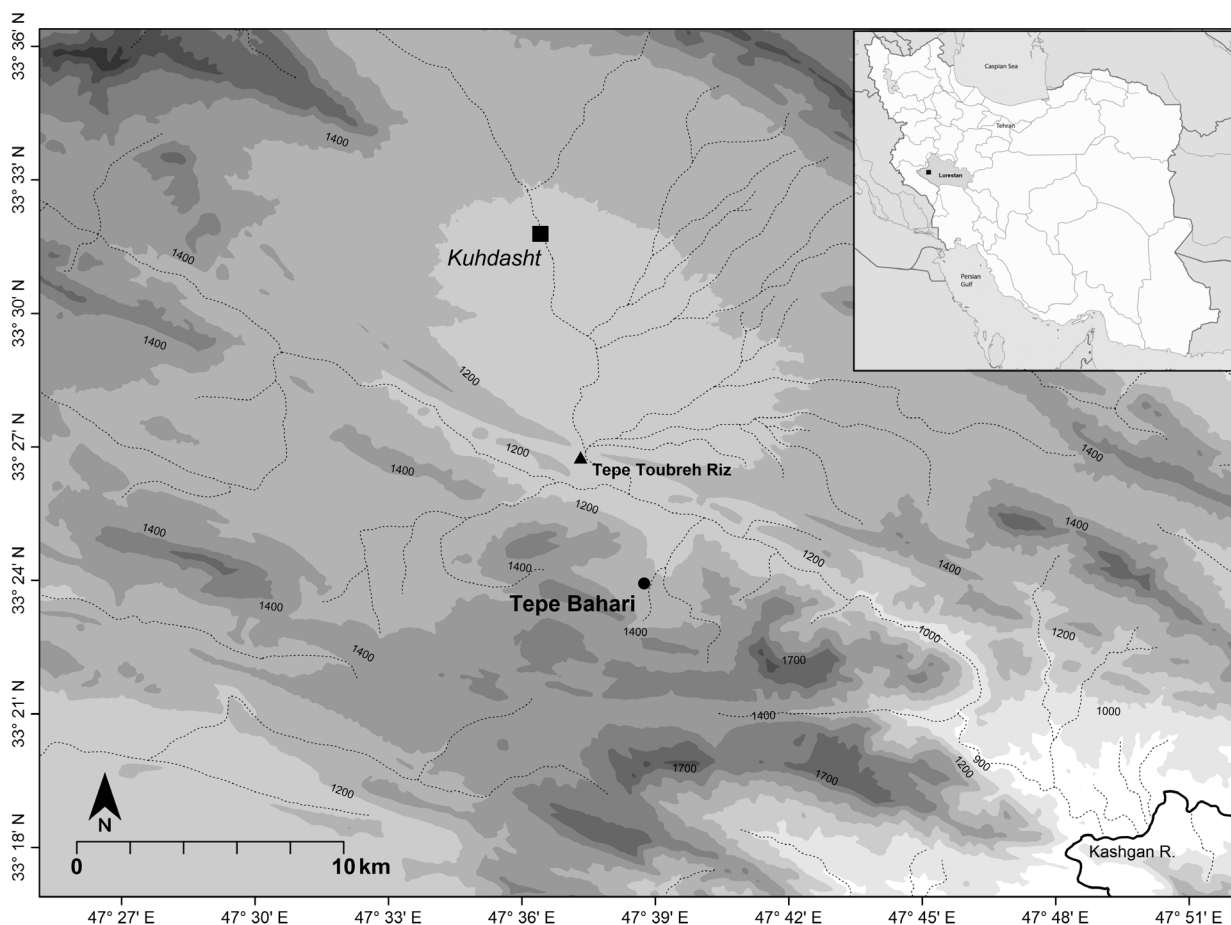


Fig. 1 Map showing the location of the research area and Tepe Bahari in Kuhdasht County. (Map: M. Zeidi, Tepe Toubreh Riz Survey Project)

Tepe Bahari

Tepe Bahari (33.39889N, 47.64583E) is a small tell site at an altitude of 1220m above sea level that is situated about 16km south of Kuhdasht in Lorestan Province (Fig. 1). The site is located in one of the small intermountain valleys of the central Zagros region in western Iran. The Zagros Mountains of up to 1600m above sea level surrounded the site, especially to the south, where the oak forests appear immediately. Tepe Bahari is a very small tell with approximate dimensions of 20×20m and rises a little more than a meter from its immediate surroundings and is located near the junction of two small seasonal streams providing one of the main sources of water for the locals (Fig. 2). A freshwater spring is also located not far from the site to the east (Fig. 3). Nowadays, the site is a part of farming land and usually under intensive cultivation of rain-fed cereals by locals, except for its summit; other parts have been ploughed repeatedly. A pit that has been made by looters and filled with some river pebbles is a visible feature at the apex of the site. On the profiles of this pit, the survey team could document traces of anthropogenic deposits, including layers with ash deposits. The survey team randomly but intensively walked on and around the site and collected all visible finds. The lithic find density was low, and in sum, 21 pieces of stone artefacts were found. A collection of historical and Islamic ceramics, however, was also found on the surface, but neither Neolithic nor later prehistoric potteries were found. The accumulation of later deposits and disturbed surface deposits could influence the low density of lithics on the surface.

Cores, tools, and blanks characterise lithic artefacts at Tepe Bahari (Fig. 4). Various fine to medium-grained cherts of white, pink, grey, brown, and reddish-brown colours were procured as raw material. A piece of exotic obsidian blade tool with greyish-green colour was also found. There are four highly reduced bladelet cores of conical/ bullet-shaped with circumferential bladelet detachments. The number of cores is small, but it is enough in this small collection to indicate that knapping was done on-site. One of the cores contains a



Fig. 2 Overview of Tepe Bahari looking towards the west. (Photo: P. Khadish, Tepe Toubreh Riz Survey Project)



Fig. 3 Freshwater spring near the site. (Photo: P. Khadish, Tepe Toubreh Riz Survey Project)

cortex with a round and smooth surface weathered via fluvial transport. This is fortunate since the cortex can provide important clues about the geological environment from which the raw material originated. The cores are all unidirectional single platform cores, from which bladelets were removed in a very regular fashion, mainly around the entire circumference. Experimental studies (*e.g.*, Wilke 1996; Inizan *et al.* 1999), show that the production of bladelets from bullet/ conical-shaped cores proceeds via pressure flaking. Tools consist of an end-scraper and thumbnail scraper made on a flake and retouched blade and bladelets. A possible sickle blade is another tool type in this collection. The blade and bladelets tools usually have direct or inversely fine lateral retouches on one or both edges. Other blanks do not show any sign of modification.

The presence of bullet/ conical-shaped bladelet cores and tools made of the blade and bladelet blanks, a possible sickle blade, a piece of the obsidian blade, and the absence of any Neolithic or later prehistoric ceramics, place Tepe Bahari within the aceramic Neolithic period (*cf.* Olszewski 1996; Kozłowski 1999; Kozłowski and Aurenche 2005). The characteristics of the chipped lithics at Tepe Bahari are similar to those of other aceramic Neolithic sites in the Zagros region (*e.g.* Hole *et al.* 1969; Hole 1977; Pullar 1990). The presence of obsidian in the lithic collection, however, may put Tepe Bahari in the latter part of the aceramic Neolithic period, which shows the appearance of obsidian artefacts around 7500 BCE in the aceramic Neolithic sites of the Near East (Kozłowski 1999: 63). Tepe Bahari lies at the junction of several habitats including a wetland of several springs and seasonal streams, upland hills which support oak parkland with grasses including wild cereals and acorns, and open alluvium plain. It was, therefore, ideally located to support a broad-spectrum economy, the typical lifeway of early Neolithic communities of the Zagros region. Locally available lithic raw materials procured from surroundings may have also attracted people from the Neolithic period to locate their camps or settlements here.

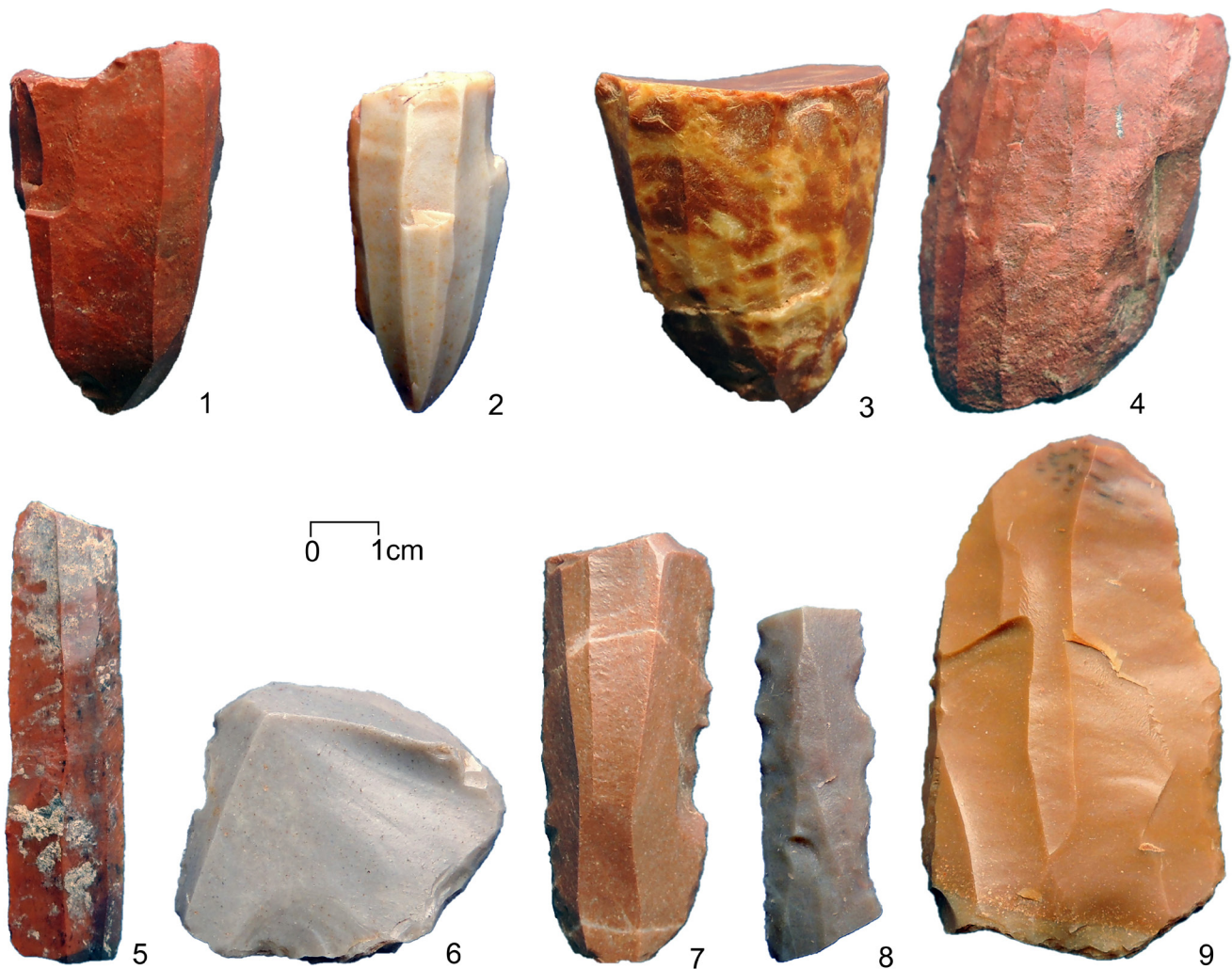


Fig. 4 Selected lithic artefacts from Tepe Bahari. (Photo: M. Zeidi, Tepe Toubreh Riz Survey Project)

Concluding Remarks

To date, Tepe Bahari is the first evidence of aceramic Neolithic occupation reported from the Kuhdasht region. Systematic excavations, however, are needed to determine the nature of occupation at this tell site. The discovery of an aceramic Neolithic site in this region demonstrates the potential importance of Kuhdasht Plain and its vicinities for further studies and adds an important data set and insight for directing future research of the Neolithic investigations in this region. Intensive systematic archaeological surveys of the region may lead to the discovery of further sites like Tepe Bahari.

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