

Intercultural relationships in South-East of Iran during the late 4th and 3rd Millennium BC: Tepe Keshari as a key site in Baluchestan region

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Abstract: The present research tries to studying an archaeological key site in south-east of Iran, which is located beside Sarbaz River. Sarbaz River is one of the most important rivers in the Baluchestan area. It flows between the Iranian Makran Mountains (Sarbaz County) and finally spilling into the Oman Sea. During the archaeological survey which has been done by the authors in 2009 Tepe Keshari has been identified in the southern parts of the riverbed of the Sarbaz, in front of Hassan Village. The studies have shown that Sarbaz's river in the 3rd millennium BC had important contributed to the formation and expansion of the settlement. It has had the interregional trading in south eastern region of Indo-Iranian borderlands that during the third millennium BC acted positively as a dynamic factor in the vast region of south eastern Iran to Oman Sea shores and southern Persian Gulf. Recent studies in this area show that the Keshari region has been dynamic commercial area between central Baluchestan, Makran and southern Persian Gulf and Oman Sea shores during third millennium BC.

Rezumat: Acest studiu încearcă să prezinte un sit arheologic cheie din sud-estul Iranului situat lângă râul Sarbaz. Râul Sarbaz este unul dintre cele mai importante râuri din zona Belucistan. Străbate Munții Makran iranieni (regiunea Sarbaz) și se varsă în cele din urmă în Marea Oman. În timpul sondajului arheologic care a fost efectuat de autori în 2009, Tepe Keshari a fost identificat în zona sudică a albiei râului Sarbaz, în fața satului Hassan. Studiile au arătat că râul Sarbaz în mileniul III î.Hr. a contribuit în mod important la formarea și extinderea așezării. S-a realizat un comerț interregional în regiunea de sud-est a granițelor indo-iraniene, care în timpul celui de-al treilea mileniu î.Hr. a acționat pozitiv ca un factor dinamic în vasta regiune din sud-estul Iranului până la țărmurile Mării Oman și sudul Golfului Persic. Studii recente în această zonă arată că regiunea Keshari a fost o zonă comercială dinamică între centrul Belucistanului, Makran și sudul Golfului Persic și țărmurile Mării Oman în timpul mileniului al treilea î.Hr.

Keywords: Baluchestan, Sarbaz River, Indo-Iranian borderland, Tepe Keshari, trade, 3rd millennium BC.

Cuvinte cheie: Belucistan, râul Sarbaz, zona de frontieră Indo-Iraniană, Tepe Keshari, comerț, mileniul III BC.

◆ Introduction

Sistan and Baluchestan is located in a vast territory in the south-east of Iran (H. Moradi 2014; H. Moradi *et alii* 2013; H. Sarhaddi-Dadian 2013; H. Sarhaddi-Dadian *et alii* 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2020 and 2021; B. Mutin *et alii* 2017; N. Miri *et alii* 2020) and Sarbaz County is located in the southern half of this province. This county is neighbor to the Iranshahr County in the north (H. Moradi *et alii* 2014), Nikshahr County in the west, Chabahar County in the south, and with Pakistan in the east (H. Moradi *et alii* 2013). This area is a mountainous region with complete chain mountains, and this compaction in this area is higher than other areas, and it continue to the Dashtiyari plain in Chabahar county (S.M.S. Sajjadi 1995). The

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agglomeration of mountains has been one of the important obstacles in the formation of large human settlements in this part during the different times, but the permanent river of the Sarbaz has had a large influence in the environmental conditions, geography and human settlements (fig. 1) Sarbaz River is considered the most important water source for this area, with its origin from Khash Mountains in the north. The river covers a large part of the county from north to the south. The river goes to the border of Chabahar in the south, and then in this part the density of mountain has reduced, and has increased on the flat land. In this area the seasonal river of the Lashar and Kaju flow to the Sarbaz River in the Hodar place that originated from Nikshahr Valley in the west, and makes its way over to south-east. Then with the name of Bahu Kalat gush in the flat desert and fertile alluvial of Dashtiyari, finally, the Sarbaz River flow into the Oman sea (Makran) near the Gulf of Goater on the border of Iran and Pakistan in the east.

◆ Archaeological background of south-east of Iran

This history of archaeological discoveries in the southeastern region of the Iranian and Pakistani Baluchestan began almost eight decades ago with Stein's field work conducted throughout Iran and Pakistan (A. Stein 1937). Afterwards, Caldwell conducted the first excavation at Tele Iblis (J.R. Caldwell 1967). Contemporary with Tele Iblis, Beatrice De Cardi conducted an excavation at Tepe Bampur in the Iranian Baluchestan (B. de Cardi 1970) and then, Lamberg Karlovsky excavated at Tepe Yahya in Kerman (C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1970). In the Pakistani Baluchestan, French mission teams conducted significant archaeological fieldwork at a neolithic site at Mehrgrah (J.F. Jarrige, M. Lecherallier 1979) and in Miri Qalat and Shahi Tump in the Kechi plain of the Baluchestan province in Pakistan (R. Besenval, P. Sanlaville 1990; R. Besenval 1997).

The fourth millennium BC in the southeastern part of the Iranian Plateau is described by some remarkable sites including Tele Iblis (J.R. Caldwell 1967), Tepe Yahya (T.W. Beale, C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1986) located in the Kerman region and Chah Hussein in the Bampur valley (A. Stein 1937). It is worth noting that aceramic Neolithic period, evident throughout the Iranian and Pakistani Baluchestan, was also found in Mehrgrah I-II (J. F. Jarrige *et alii* 1995). In southeastern Iran, in the Kerman region and Bampur valley, the fifth and fourth millennium BC is characterized by black on buff or red and Lapui wares (B. Mutin 2013, p. 255). The first sample of buff ware emerged in Yahya VI period in the late fifth millennium BC. It argued that it was imported from Fars and is related to fifth millennium BC Bakun ceramics (T.W. Beale, C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1986, p. 58-88). Therefore, black on buff ware was produced during Period VB, and was used into Period VA in the fourth millennium BC (Ibid). However, in period VA, black on buff wares were replaced by black on red (T.W. Beale, C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1986, p. 67-80). This pottery has been distributed throughout a vast area from Tele Iblis in Kerman (J.R. Caldwell 1967; M.R. Sarraf 1981) to the Bampur valley in the Iranian Baluchestan (A. Stein 1937; H. Moradi *et alii* 2014). The dating for these periods is supported by radio carbon dating which indicates the first quarter of the fourth millennia BC for VB and for VA the periods between 3700 and 3300 BC (T.W. Beale, C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1986, p. 10, 13), (tab. 1). Recently, in southeastern Iran, approximately 70 sites were discovered in the Bampur valley ranging in date from the fourth to the third millennium BC (H. Moradi 2014, p. 169). Various kinds of black on red ware related to Yahya VA samples were identified at 18 sites (H. Moradi *et alii* 2014).

In Pakistani Makran, the first half of the fourth millennium BC is referred to as Kech-Makran, Period II, and represents the first appearance of pottery in this region. The main ceramic type in Period II, is Miri ware. Miri ware is a fine painted ware that includes several types of forms in buff, tan and grey. Decoration is mostly comprised of geometric designs, although a stylized ibex is also a common motif. These vessels were made by coiling and were then shaped and smoothed. Other kinds of pottery in Miri II are basket ware, formed inside baskets, and coarse ware. Miri II ware has also been found in the Bampur valley, Fanuch, the Iranian and Chah Hussein by A. Stein (B. Mutin 2014, p. 253). Numerous fragments of Miri pottery have been found recently in the Bampur Valley by Iranian archaeologists (H. Moradi *et alii* 2014). Pottery from Kerman provides the best comparative analysis, particularly regarding certain vessels from Aliabad (Iblis IV) and Tepe Yahya VI-V in the Soughan valley in Kerman (B. Mutin 2014, p. 254). These similarities only relate to certain types of form and decoration. Many types from both regions display their local characteristics.

In the third millennium BC, the most controversial aspect of archaeology is concentrated on interaction spheres or relationships between the Indus civilization and Mesopotamia. Most scholars believe that the pathway of this connection traversed from the south-east of the Iranian plateau. However, interaction spheres in the southeastern region of Iran are supported by excavations at key sites including Tepe Yahya and Shahr I Sokhta (C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, M. Tosi 1973). Recent discoveries in the Halil Rud basin in Kerman evaluated these hypotheses (Y. Madjidzade 2007) raising this topic once again. Some scholars argue that interactions between Shahr I Sokhta and Harappa were established during the third millennia. Some remarkable materials seen at Shahr I Sokhta, Pakistani Makran, Baluchestan and Harappa sites including Nusharo (E. Cortesi *et alii* 2008) support this hypothesis. Objects include 'only few Nal sherds, most of them found in Shahr-I Sokhta 3I and one from Tepe Yahya, a canister jar from Shahr-I Sokhta, two so-called Kot Dijian jars, one from the Central Quarters of Shahr-I Sokhta and the latter from Mundigak and last but not least an unfired terracotta female figurine, like the Zhob type found in Shahr-I Sokhta' (M. Tosi 1983). While the material evidence of exchange and contacts is indeed scanty (E. Cortesi *et alii* 2008, p. 5-35) recently, other archaeologists have rejected this idea (J.F. Jarrige, A. Didier 2011).

◆ Tepe Keshari location

Tepe Keshari as a main site in the southwestern part of Iran. It is located in Keshari plain at Pishin area, which is the part of Sarbaz region in Iranian Baluchestan (fig. 1). In this area, Keshari plain as a terminal domain of the mountainous region reaches to the flat lands of Dashtiyari in the north of Oman Sea in Iranian coasts (H. Sarhaddi-Dadian, H. Moradi 2009). Sarbaz river as a permanent river in this area, flows from north and continues to the Oman sea in the south. Geographically, flat lands and permanent source water have provided suitable conditions for formation of human settlements during the chalcolithic period and Bronze age (4th and 3rd millennium BC). Tepe Keshari has a significant height of about 3 meters over the surrounding grounds and also a diameter of about 50 meters (fig. 2), which other sites around it have no height more than 1 meter.

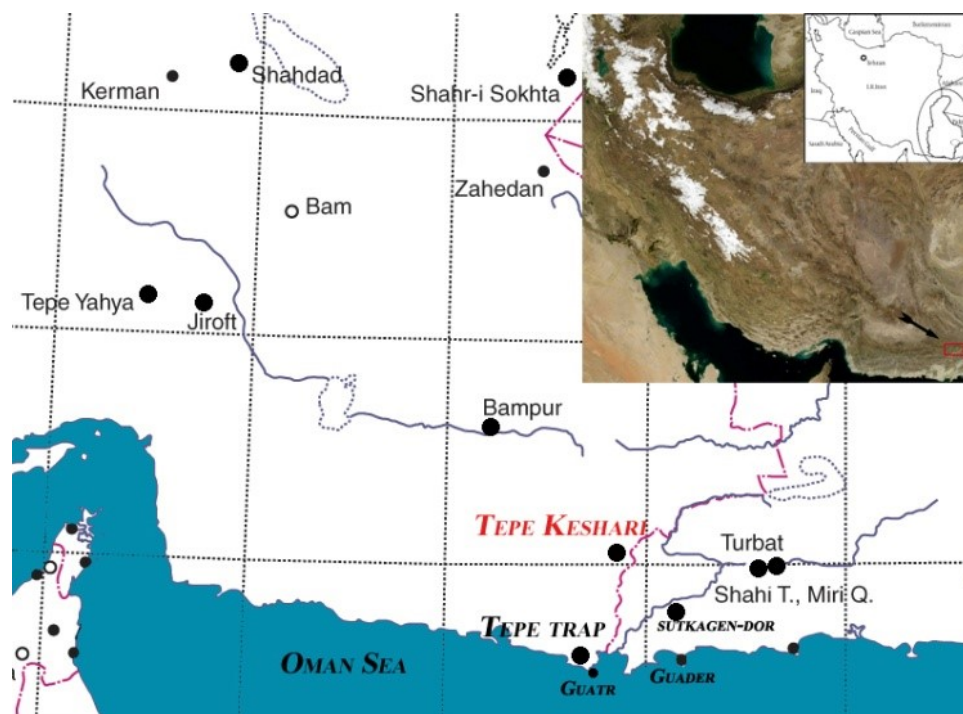


Fig. 1. Tepe Keshari and other adjacent sites.
Tepe Keshari și siturile învecinate.



Fig. 2. Tepe Keshari from south.
Tepe Keshari dinspre sud.

◆ Cultural material of Tepe Keshari

In the first season of archaeological survey at Sarbaz region that held by authors, the surface of Tepe Keshari covered by different kinds of potsherds and cultural materials that surprised us because there was no site with such diversity in the surface phenomena in Sarbaz region in the borderlands of Iranian – Pakistani Baluchestan. Painted black on red and black on gray potsherds along with stone tools such as bifacial micro blades and other kinds of stone blades, shells, alabaster vessels and bronze objects widely scattered on the surface of the site that suggests broad spectrum household activities. Moreover, many lithic objects with delicate slices and various forms suggest dynamic agricultural activities alongside hunting on the riverbank of Sarbaz (fig. 3). The red and grey shards are painted with geometric designs which include series of hatched triangles, super imposed zigzag parallel lines, mutual hatched triangles and etc. Among gathered material from the surface of Tepe Keshari we have the vast chrono - cultural range of material which starts from 4th millennia and continues to the middle of third millennium BC. Most of them are comparable with Miri ware (Miri II-IIIa) in 4th millennium BC (B. Mutin *et alii* 2017), Miri Qalat IIIB-C about 2700 to 2300 BC in Kech – Makran in Pakistanian Baluchestan (R. Besenval 1994; R. Besenval, A. Didier 2004; A. Didier 2007) and with the Bampur sequences in Iranian Baluchestan about 2900-2600 BC (B. de Cardi 1970; H. Moradi *et alii* 2014) and also with Yahya VB-A (in 4th millennium BC) and IVB-C (beginning of 3rd millennium BC) in Kerman and Shahr i Sokhta period I.9-8 beginning of 3rd millennium BC in Iranian Sistan. These similarities could be interpreted as wide cultural interactions with adjacent areas in the fourth and third millennium BC. (fig. 4).

As Thomas Beale mentioned, a large part of the valuable objects for commercial aims have been brought from the Iranian plateau to the different part of Indo-Iranian borderlands (T.W. Beale 1973; H. Sarhaddi-Dadiand *et alii* 2020). Accordingly, two pieces of the soapstone or chlorite vessels also have been found on the surface. This type of raw and finished materials are considered as a key factor for long distance trade during the third millennium BC (P.L. Kohl 1979) whereas, their sources were both in Kerman and Oman peninsula (P.L. Kohl *et alii* 1978). By now, there are no evidence of chlorite mines or sources in Baluchestan area. Otherwise, we collected numerous pieces of alabaster vessels, which was another characteristic signs of inter-regional and long distance trade (fig. 5).

◆ Conclusion

According to the analysis of cultural materials in Keshari plain, they indicate a cross-regional relationships which had short geographical distances to sites in Kech-Makrani in the east, coastal sites in Oman Sea in the south (R. Besenval, A. Didier 2004), Bampur valley and Dowlatabad plain in Kerman in the west and Sistan in the north.

In Keshari region two factors had been important to shape some settlements. First, its distance as a regional commercial center to the Oman Sea in the one hand, and the placement of this region between Bampur valley and Kerman region in Iran and Kechi plain in Pakistan on the other hand. It is worth noting that in the coast of Goatr in Chabahar in the south of Keshari plain, we found a 3rd millennia coastal site named Tepe Trap¹. The permanent river and fertile plain along with flat lands were considered as a second factor that provided both food based on agriculture and an easy access to long distance destinations. Therefore, Tepe

¹ The archaeological survey of Oman sea was held by Hossein Moradi, Rouhollah Shirazi and Behzad Ali Talesh in different years from 2010 to 2012.

Keshari should be an example of a commercial intermediary site among Iranian's Baluchestan in the west, Oman Sea in the south and the Kech-Makran plain in the east.

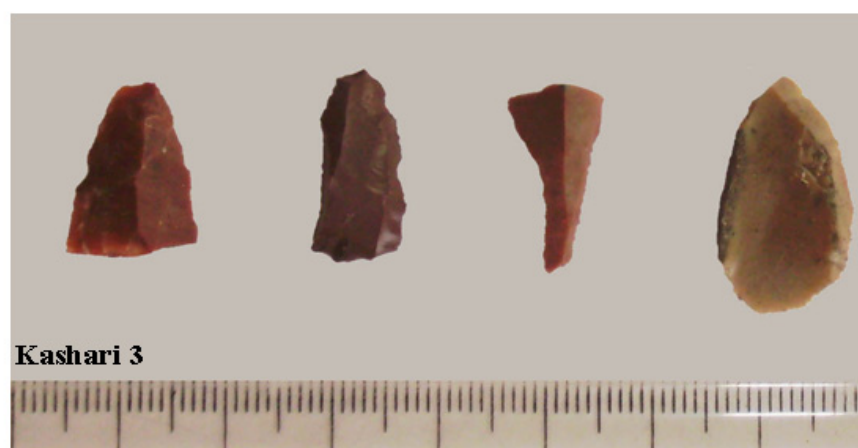
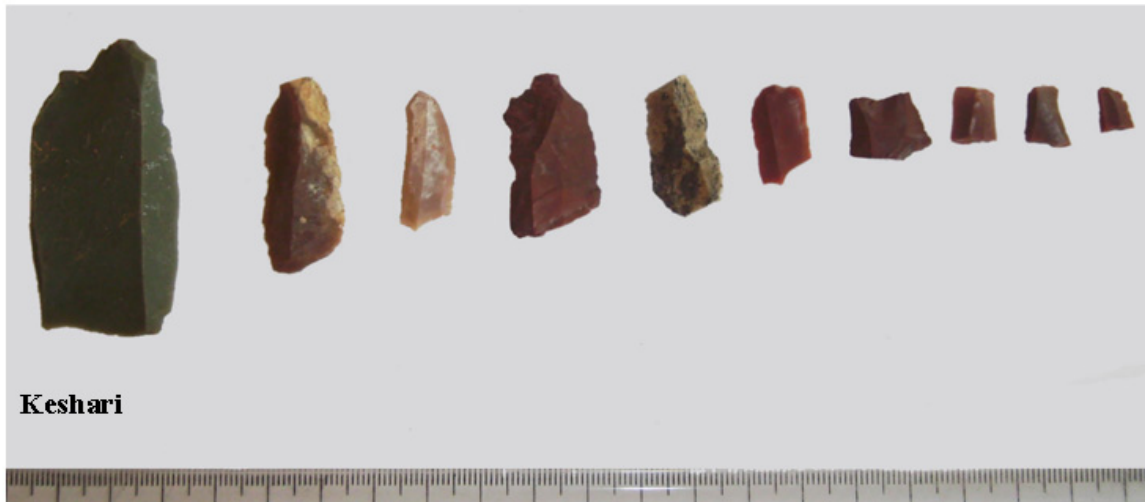


Fig. 3. Stone tools with different functions from Keshari region.
Unelte de piatră cu diferite funcționalități din regiunea Keshari.

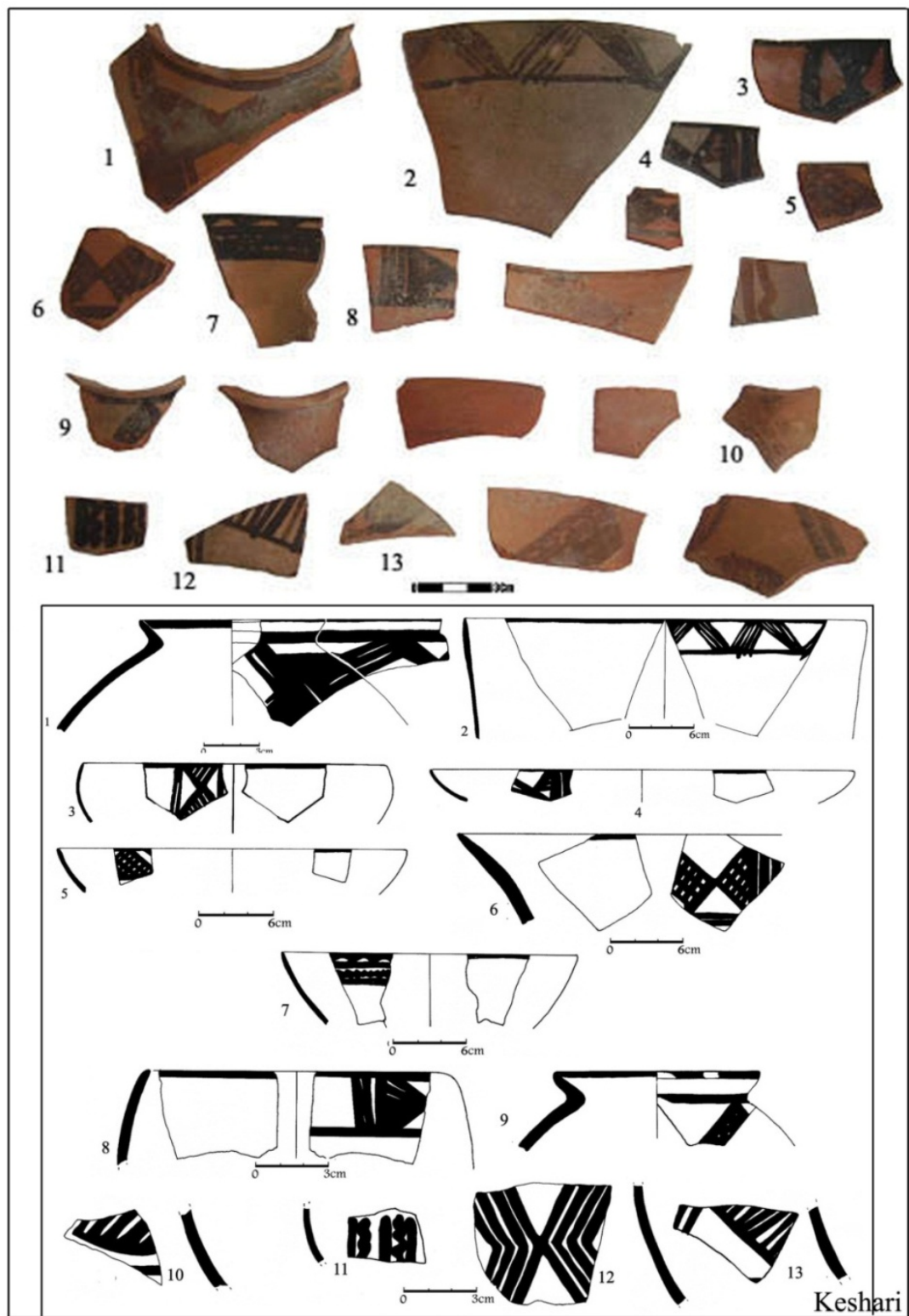


Fig. 4. Pottery of Tepe Keshari.
Ceramică de la Tepe Keshari.

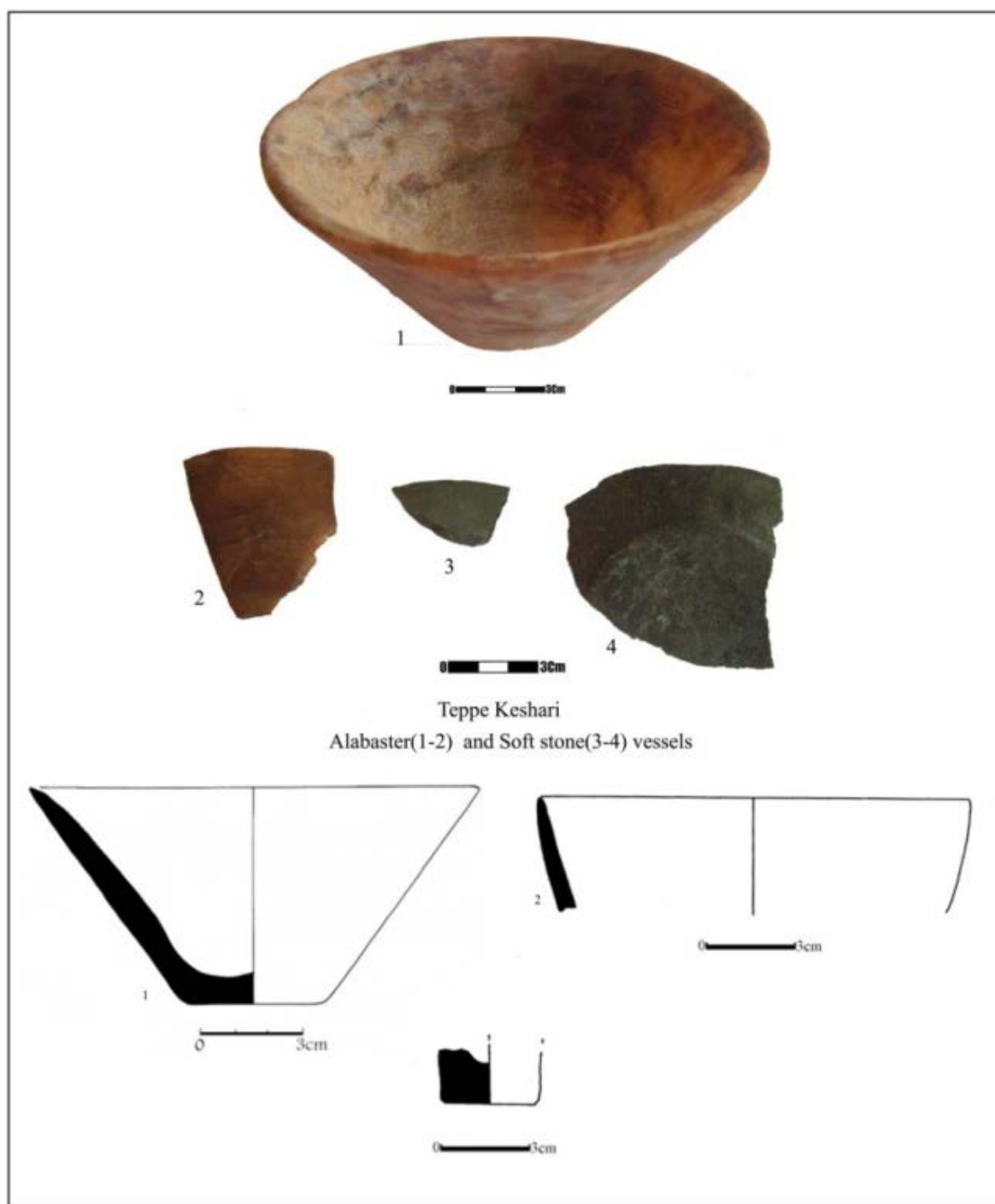


Fig. 5. Chlorite and alabaster vessels from Tepe Keshari.
Vase din clorit și alabastru de la Tepe Keshari.

In general, we can suggest that the motifs of Keshari's pottery show visible multi-regional effects as well as the Bampur valley and Kechi plain. It is a sign of cultural dynamic in the Keshari plain during the fourth and third millennium BC, which was located near the Oman Sea. The presence of Keshari region in the chalcolithic period and Bronze Age indicates regional interaction based on commercial trading of materials between Iran and Pakistan Baluchistan. Diversity of the characteristic cultural materials on the site may reflect both the commercial activities and the presence of merchants in these areas that have been transferring

their goods to the Oman sea specially at the middle of third millennium BC (J.R. Alden 1982). So far further information will be inferred from more field works.

| Keshari (number of shard) | Bampur Iran | Kech- Makran Pakistan | Sistan Iran | Kerman Iran |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | | Miri II (chalcolithic) B. Mutin 2007, fig. II.58.18 | | |
| 2 | | | Shahr I Sokhta I.9 Beginning of 3 rd millennium R. Biscione 1981, fig. 10.15 | Yahya IVC (4 th -3 rd millennium) D.T. Potts <i>et alii</i> 2001, fig. 1.44.c |
| 3 | Miri II ware from Tomp i Qasimabad B. Mutin 2013, fig. 14.4.4 | Miri II (chalcolithic) B. Mutin 2007, fig. II.41.17 | | |
| 4 | | Miri II (chalcolithic) B. Mutin 2007, fig. II | | |
| 5 | | | Shahr I Sokhta I.9 Beginning of 3 rd millennium R. Biscione 1981, fig. 10.9 | Yahya IVC (4 th -3 rd millennium) D.T. Potts <i>et alii</i> 2001, fig. 1.12 |
| 6 | | | | Yahya VB-A (5 th -4 th millennium) B. Mutin 2012, fig. 8.6 |
| 7 | | Miri IIIa (4 th -3 rd millennium) B. Mutin 2013, fig. 14.15.16 | Shahr I Sokhta I.9-8 Beginning of 3 rd millennium | |
| 8 | | Miri II (chalcolithic) B. Mutin 2007, fig. II.61.11 | | |
| 11 | | Miri II (chalcolithic) B. Mutin 2007, fig. II.42.5 and fig. II. 73.7-8 | | Yahya VA (4 th millennium) T.W. Beale, C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, 1986, fig. 4.39.c |

Tab. 1. Cultural interactions and pottery connections between Keshari region and other third millennia sites in Indo- Iranian borderlands.

Interațiuni culturale și conexiuni privind ceramica între regiunea Keshari și alte situri din mileniul trei din zonele de graniță indo-iraniene.

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