

Archaeological Survey of the Mariwan Region: Results from Two Seasons of Fieldwork for Identifying Sites and Cultural Sequences

بررسی باستان‌شناختی منطقه مریوان؛ نتایج دو فصل بررسی میدانی شناسایی محوطه‌ها و توالی‌های فرهنگی

Nemat Hariri^{1*}, Fateh Zarefar², Hamzeh Mohammadpour³, *⁵ نعمت حریری^{۱*}، فاتح زارع‌فر^۲، حمزه محمدپور^۳، سامران آسیابانی^۴، محمد مصومیان^{۵*}
Samran Asiabani⁴, Mohammad Masoumian^{5*}

1 Postdoctoral Researcher in Georachaeology, Faculty of Geology, University of Tehran,

^۱ پژوهشگر پس‌دکتری باستان‌زمین‌شناسی، دانشکده زمین‌شناسی، دانشگاه تهران.

Iran. Corresponding author: hariri.nemat@gmail.com

نویسنده مسئول: hariri.nemat@gmail.com

2 PhD Candidate in Prehistoric Archaeology, University of Tehran, Iran.

^۲ دانشجوی دکتری باستان‌شناسی پیش از تاریخ، دانشگاه تهران.

3 PhD Candidate in Islamic Period Archaeology, University of Tehran, Iran.

^۳ دانشجوی دکتری باستان‌شناسی دوران اسلامی، دانشگاه تهران.

4 MA Graduate in Architecture, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran.

^۴ کارشناسی ارشد معماری، دانشگاه بوعلی سینا همدان.

5 Department of Archaeology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

^۵ دانش‌آموخته دکتری باستان‌شناسی دانشگاه تهران.

Corresponding author: masoumianmohammad90@gmail.com

نویسنده مسئول: masoumianmohammad90@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Mariwan region has had considerable cultural relations with northern Zagros throughout different historical and prehistoric periods. This region, at various times, has served as a buffer zone between two areas rich in ancient sites: west of central and south of northern Zagros. To understand the nature and extent of this role, it is essential to examine the material culture interactions in this region. Evidence collected from recent studies in northern Mesopotamia has revealed a complex pattern of cultural interaction with western Iran during different periods. For example, the Uruk-period finds obtained from different surveys conducted in Mariwan region and discovery of an Assyrian inscription from the vicinity of Qaleh Imam, provide a new insight into the intercultural encounters and communication networks with the Iranian highlands. Thus, Mariwan County has a considerable potential for archaeological studies. During field surveys covering a 670 km² area in the mountainous part of this county in August 2021 and September 2023, we identified numerous sites spanning from the Palaeolithic to the Late Islamic period. These include caves, rock shelters, open-air Palaeolithic sites, forts and watchtowers, cemeteries, monuments, as well as temporary and permanent settlements. During these two seasons, a total number of 403 sites were identified, 217 in the first and 186 in the second season, with the Islamic period sites being the most represented (129 sites).

چکیده: منطقه مریوان در طی دوره‌های مختلف تاریخی و پیش‌ازتاریخی دارای ارتباطات فرهنگی ویژه‌ای با زاگرس شمالی بوده است؛ به نحوی که در طی دوره‌های مختلف به‌عنوان منطقه حائل بین دو جغرافیای برخورداری و غنی از محوطه‌های باستانی یعنی غرب‌زاگرس مرکزی و جنوب زاگرس شمالی (بین‌النهرین) ایفای نقش کرده است. برای درک چگونگی این نقش بررسی تعاملات فرهنگ مادی در این منطقه حائز اهمیت است. شواهد حاصل از تحقیقات اخیر در شمال بین‌النهرین به الگوهای پیچیده تعامل فرهنگی با غرب ایران طی دوره‌های مختلف اشاره دارد. یافته‌های اوروک بدست آمده طی بررسی‌های مختلف در مریوان به همراه کتیبه آشوری کشف‌شده از قلعه امام، بینش‌های مهم جدیدی را در مورد برخورداری بینا فرهنگی و شبکه ارتباطی به ارتفاعات ایران را ارائه می‌دهد، با توجه به مواردی که اشاره شد، به احتمال شهرستان مریوان دارای پتانسیل بسیار بالایی برای مطالعات در حوزه‌های مختلف باستان‌شناسی است. نتایج اولیه بررسی مساحتی بالغ بر ۶۷۰ کیلومتر مربع در بخش کوهستانی این شهرستان حاکی از کشف استقرارهای متنوع از پارینه‌سنگی تا قرون متأخر اسلامی است که شامل انواع محوطه‌ها نظیر غار، پناهگاه‌های صخره‌ای، محوطه‌های روباز پارینه‌سنگی، قلعه، برج‌های دیدبانی، گورستان، محوطه‌های استقرار و استقرارهای فصلی و ابنیه است. در دو فصل بررسی مجموعاً ۴۰۳ محوطه شناسایی گردید که از این تعداد ۲۱۷ محوطه در فصل اول و ۱۸۶ محوطه در فصل دوم کشف شد. تعداد محوطه‌های دوران اسلامی با ۱۲۹ محوطه بیشترین تعداد را به خود اختصاص داده‌اند.

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واژگان کلیدی

بررسی باستان‌شناسی
شهرستان مریوان
گورستان‌های خمره‌ای
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1. Introduction

Since the establishment and expansion of archaeology in Iran, numerous field studies have been conducted. These studies have resulted in the establishment of a general overview about the quantity and quality of archaeological sites across large parts of the country (Masoumian *et al.*, 2025). However, significant portions of Iran remain unexplored, lacking comprehensive and targeted archaeological research. Consequently, Iran's archaeological map remains incomplete.

Experience gained from archaeological projects demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted archaeological surveys. Unlike excavations, surveys do not disrupt the context of archaeological sites. They provide useful insights into the cultural evolution of different archaeological periods. In addition, surveys are cost-efficient and allow for additional investigations if needed (Wilshusen *et al.*, 2016). Scientific and systematic surveys play a crucial role in understanding the cultural evolution during different periods. Unlike excavations, which can disrupt the context of ancient sites, surveys allow exploration without interference. This non-invasive approach ensures minimal damage to these important places. If any errors occur during a survey, additional surveys can rectify them. Accordingly, archaeological surveys are regarded as one of the most efficient and cost-effective field methods for research.

Because some regions of Iran have not yet been fully documented in terms of their archaeological remains, those regions have received less attention from archaeologists, and Kurdistan Province is no exception to this rule. In this regard, provincial Cultural Heritage officials have conducted archaeological surveys in all parts of the province over the past several years. Mariwan County, in Kurdistan Province, has undergone scattered surveys at multiple stages. These surveys primarily aim to explore the archaeological potential of the county (Azizi, 2002; Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2003). In some cases, some parts of the county were selected and studied separately (Central Plain and Kumasi District) (Zamani, 2018; Shajiei, 2005). However, lack of coherent and continuous studies in this region prompted us to initiate a research project in 2021 to complete previous surveys and studies related to the region (Masoumian and Hariri, 2022). Using advanced hardware and software techniques and resources, authors and their colleagues conducted targeted, comprehensive, and detailed

archaeological surveys in the Mariwan region (Hariri and Masoumian, 2025).

2. Outline of the Research

Mariwan City, located in Kurdistan Province, lies 135 km west of Sanandaj City (Fig. 1). The geographical coordinates of Mariwan are approximately 35°32' N, 46°10' E. The city rests at an elevation of 1286 m above sea level. Covering an area of 2326 km², Mariwan county occupies a significant portion (7.77%) of the province's total area. The county is divided into three administrative regions, comprising two towns and six villages. Additionally, the area can be divided into two geological sections (Aghanabati, 2004). The western section, adjacent to the Suren Mountains, lies along the Zagros thrust and the Bisotun-Shahu limestone karst block, while the eastern, southern, and northern parts of the county are located within Sanandaj–Sirjan magmatic zone (Fig. 2). The Sianaw Valley forms the geographical dividing zone between these two distinct landscapes (Fig. 3). In the western part of Kurdistan Province, particularly in the cities of Mariwan, Sarvabad, and Kamyaran, the terrain differs significantly from that of the east owing to geological variation. Cultural disparities are also evident, with the western region consistently drawing researchers' attention for its cultural richness compared to the eastern part (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2002; Saed Mucheshi and Rahmati, 2013; Zamani Dadaneh, 2018).

The central plain of Mariwan is pivotal due to its intermontane plains, perennial rivers, and the presence of Lake Zaribar (Fig. 4). Although the history of archaeological studies in the Mariwan plain and surrounding areas is relatively limited, Mariwan has played a key role in the formation of human habitats and societies in western Iran during different prehistoric, historical, and Islamic periods, owing to its geographical location, environmental resources, and proximity to key centres of civilization in Western Asia. Mariwan's strategic geographical position has made it one of the most crucial communication hubs between the Iranian Plateau and Mesopotamia.

All of the aforementioned factors make Mariwan not only a central location for comprehending cultural developments in western Iran, but also a significant region for conducting archaeological research. Investigation of this region can substantially enhance our understanding of the political and cultural interactions between Iran and Mesopotamia over the past millennia.

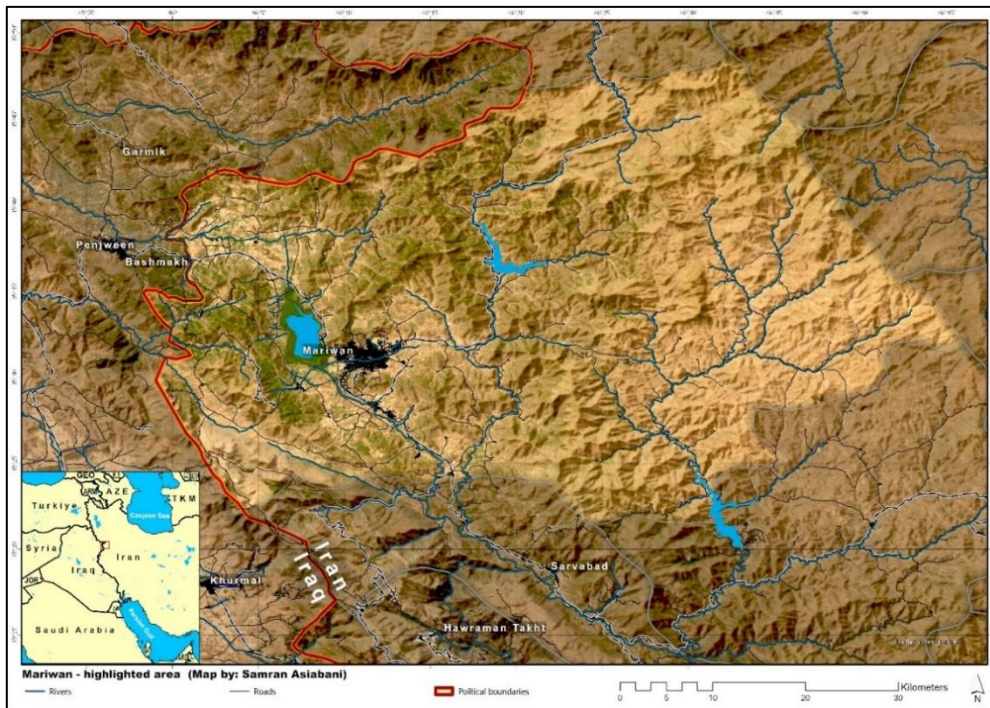


Fig. 1. Map showing location of Mariwan in Western Iran (by S. Asiabani).

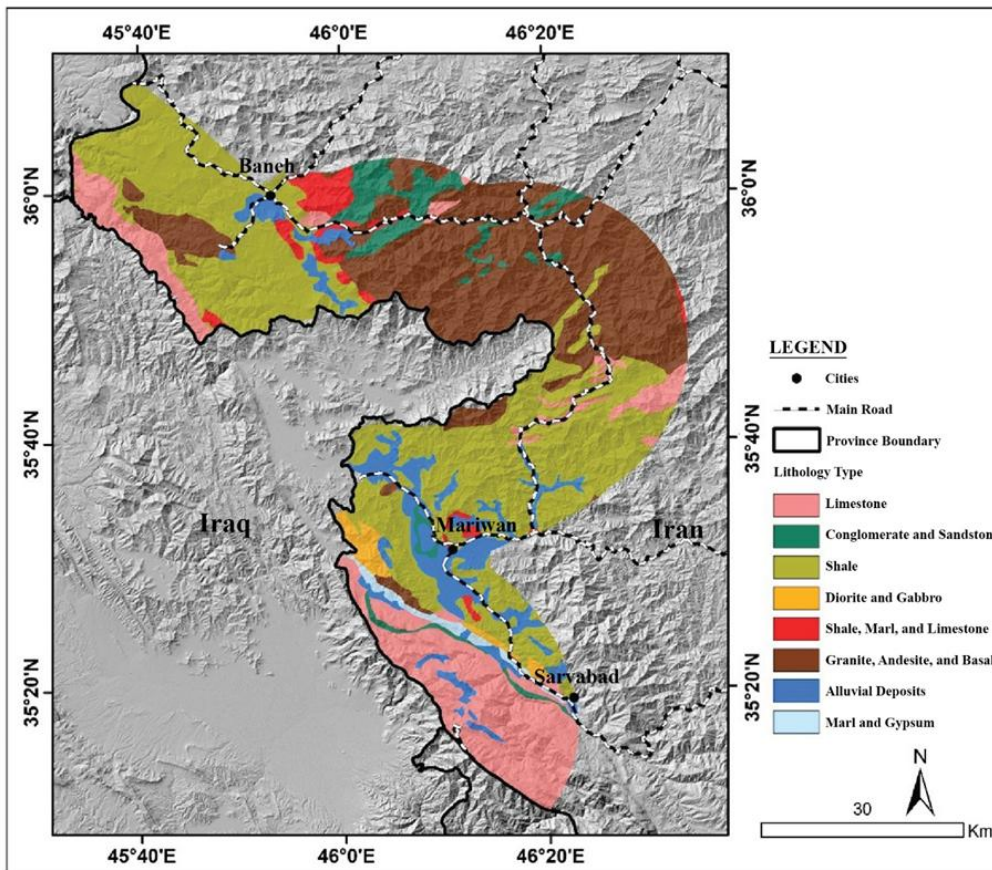


Fig. 2. Geological and petrological map of the border strip of Kurdistan Province (by H. Ganjaeian).

The history of archaeological studies in the Central Zagros basin dates back to the excavations of Tepe Giyan in Nahavand from 1931 to 1932. Subsequently, extensive excavations at Godin Tappe further increased scholarly interest in the region (Young and Levine, 1974; Young, 1965). In the northern regions of Central Zagros, located in Kurdistan Province, only a limited number of archaeological surveys and excavations were conducted in the past two decades and comprehensive and coherent research on this region is still lacking. Mariwan region was included in initial archaeological surveys conducted by Department of Archaeology at Bu-Ali Sina University of Hamedan (Azizi, 2002), and registration files were prepared by former officials of Mariwan's General Department of Cultural Heritage, Iqbal Azizi and Faryad Haddadian. Investigations in this county were initiated under the supervision of Yaqub Mohammadifar and Abbas Motarjem and led to an archaeological survey in the region (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2008). Subsequently, several Parthian cemeteries were identified, some of which were included in the National Heritage List (Mohammadifar and Hojabri Nobari, 2004). Furthermore, Bu-Ali Sina University's surveys yielded valuable information on the continuity of settlements in Kurdistan province (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2008).

Shajiei (2005) conducted an archaeological survey in Kumasi Village of Mariwan county. Subsequently, Vafaei (2006) conducted another survey in Mariwan. Haddadian (2009) also surveyed Mariwan. Karimian (2015), from the University of Tehran, extensively excavated Qaleh Imam in Mariwan (Karimian and Masoumian, 2016). Masoumian (2017) excavated Zardoian cemetery. Moreover, Binandeh (2018) conducted a stratigraphic excavation at Tepe Qaleh Naneh, while Zamani Dadaneh (2018) simultaneously conducted a field survey in the central plain of Mariwan. In the same year, Sadeghi Rad (2018) conducted a survey in parts of Mariwan to prepare the necessary documentation for Hawraman's registration in UNESCO's World Heritage List. Overall, previous studies, including archaeological surveys and registration files, identified less than 100 archaeological sites, a number that appears to be significantly lower than the actual number of sites in the region. In 2021, a new project was initiated to supplement previous studies and to cover the remaining regions of the county. Under Hariri and Masoumian's supervision, a group of experts in various fields of archaeology and interdisciplinary disciplines conducted a resurvey in the county. This article presents preliminary results of these two survey seasons (Hariri and Masoumian, 2021; Masoumian and Hariri, 2023).



Fig. 3. The Sianaw Valley divides two distinct landscapes in the Mariwan region (Photo by M. Masoumian).



Fig. 4. The landscape of Mariwan Plain (Photo by H. Faqihzadeh).

3. Materials and Methods

The idea for a complementary survey of Mariwan was proposed in response to the limitations of previous studies mentioned above. With the support of the General Department of Cultural Heritage of Kurdistan Province and the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT), necessary permits were obtained. Previous research indicated that a complementary survey for one or two seasons would complete this region's surveyed area. However, contrary to expectations, after two seasons of field research (spanning 63 days), we understood that additional time is required to complete the survey. Factors such as the region's topography and the need to survey all valleys extended the timeline. To date, only a quarter of the study area has been covered.

At the outset, a distinct code was assigned to each site, comprising an abbreviation for the project name (Mariwan Area Survey) and a unique site number. The field methodology involved conducting an intensive on foot survey (Fig. 5), taking into account the unique circumstances and the region's potential for habitation. The aim was to meticulously survey all potential settlement locations, including riverbanks, streams, springs, valleys, foothills, and mountaintops. In order to enhance survey's accuracy,

supplementary programs and materials such as ArcGIS, QField, Google Earth, and CORONA Satellite imagery were used as well. Consequently, very few terrestrial cultural remains are likely to have escaped the surveyors' examination. Detailed documentation ensures that monitoring and re-evaluation remain feasible at any time.

In these surveys, the size of sites was evaluated using common criteria to gain a clearer understanding of the distribution and extent of surface finds. All sites, including forts, cemeteries, and residential areas, were divided into smaller sections based on topography and site size (Fig. 6). This approach was adopted because the distribution of surface finds can indicate the past extent of sites. Accordingly, recording precise specifications, coordinates, dimensions, and sizes of archaeological sites, along with the spatial extent of associated cultural materials, provides a comprehensive understanding of the sites. Unlike numerous survey reports that merely plot GPS coordinates on a map, this approach offers a clearer picture of site dimensions, size, and characteristics. In our current research, we have addressed this deficiency to create the most accurate archaeological map for the study area to date.



Fig. 5. Movement and survey model of the group during field survey (Photo by H. Mohammadpour, 2023).

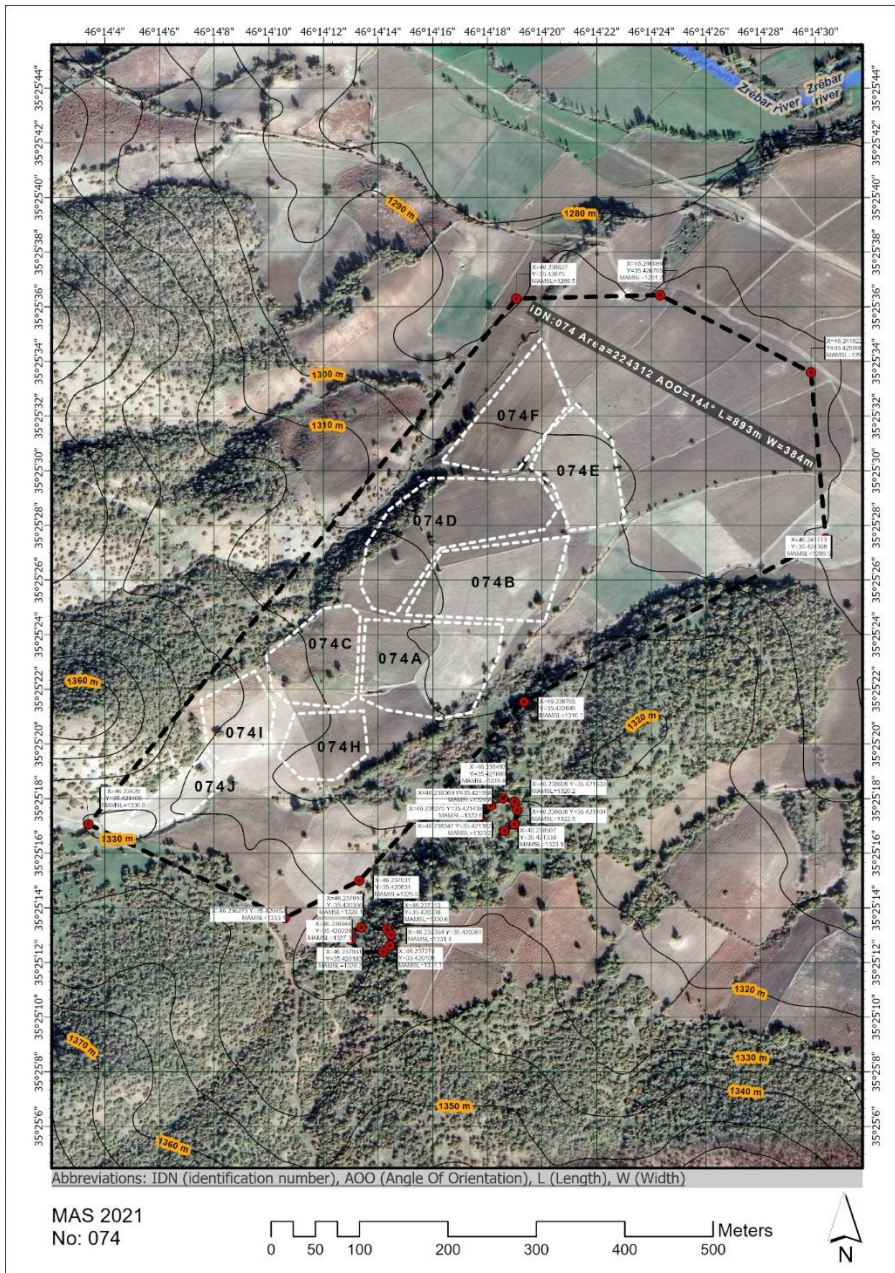


Fig. 6. Map illustrating the division of the sites into smaller sections based on size and topography (MAS.074) (Photo by S. Asiabani).

4. Results

After establishing the survey methodology based on permit duration, budget constraints, and the political and geographical context of Mariwan, we selected western, southwestern, and southern parts of the region to start the project. These areas were chosen due to their proximity to Iran-Iraq border and the need to complete surveys in line with previous studies. With a travel permit secured from the Mariwan border guard, field operations commenced along the border line. Notably, these areas had not

been surveyed comprehensively before due to potential danger posed by uncleared war-era landmines. In two survey seasons, we could cover 670 square kilometres of Mariwan's 2,326 square kilometres area. The surveys led to identification of 403 sites spanning from Palaeolithic to late Islamic periods (Fig. 7). Based on the recovered finds, 341 sites were relatively dated. The remaining 62 sites have not yet been dated and their chronology requires further research. Each period's findings is briefly described below. Table 1 (see also Fig. 8)

presents the number of sites attributed to each period.

According to our classification, archaeological sites are grouped into categories such as Palaeolithic open areas, caves, rock shelters, residential areas,

cemeteries, forts/watchtowers, seasonal settlements, and buildings. Some sites exhibit a combination of these features. Table 2 displays sites classification together with their corresponding quantity (see Fig. 9).

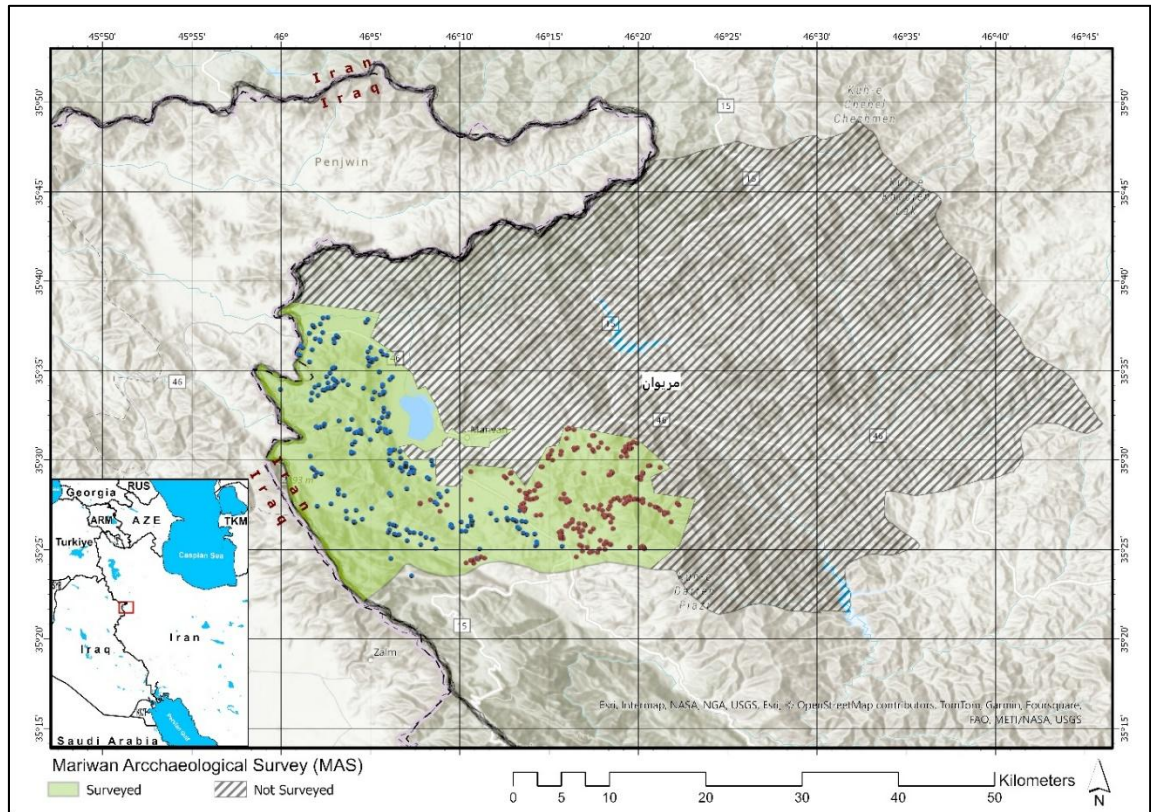


Fig. 7. Map showing the surveyed area (in green) and the remaining area of the entire survey project of Mariwan County. Blue and red dots represent respectively sited identified in the first and second season (by S. Asiabani).

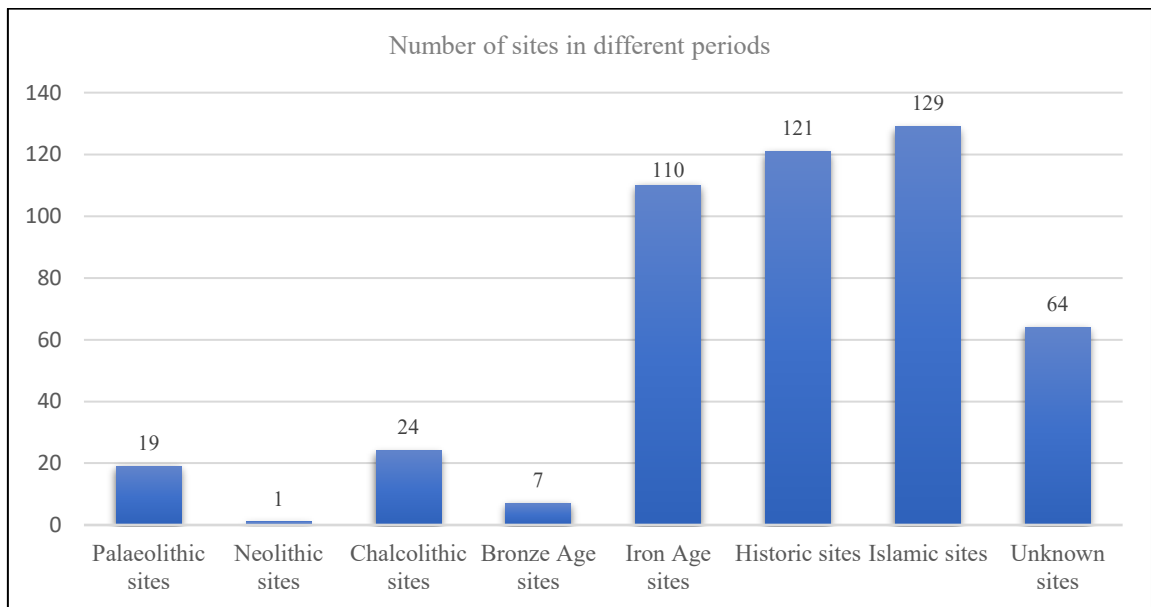


Fig. 8. Number of the identified sites during two survey seasons in Mariwan Region.

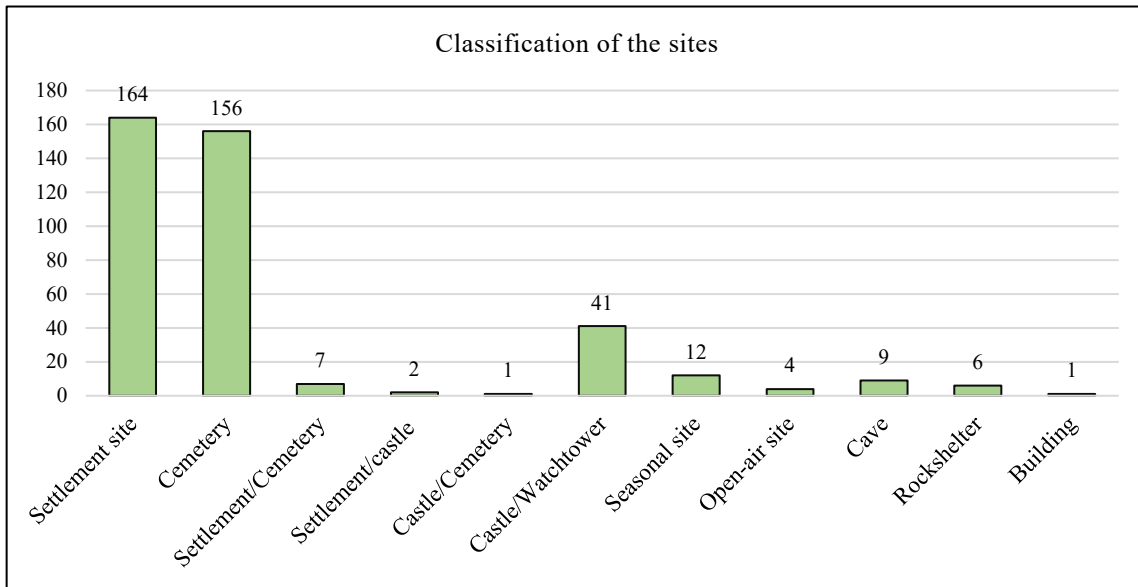


Fig. 9. Classification table of the identified sites.

5. Palaeolithic Period

Nineteen Palaeolithic sites were identified based on available finds. Among them, 11 were shelters, including six caves and five rock shelters. The remaining eight sites were either open area or an area located on river terraces, which were associated with radiolarite outcrops and chert sources. Some sites with only one typical Palaeolithic find were found outside the Zagros context, and hence their information was not included in the overall statistical analysis of Palaeolithic sites.

Although all data derive from surface finds and lack absolute chronological control, typological and

technological comparisons of stone tools with key sites in central and northern Zagros (Heydari-Guran *et al.*, 2021; Solecki, 1963) suggest occupation in this region from the Middle Palaeolithic through the Epipalaeolithic era. In addition, most of the sites contained stone tools associated with the Middle Palaeolithic, exhibiting the characteristics of the Levallois technology (Fig. 10). Traces of the Kermanshah radiolarite belt are visible on the geological border between the Zagros and Sanandaj-Sirjan zones, where it plays a significant role in the formation of Palaeolithic sites in the region (Hariri *et al.*, 2024; 2025).

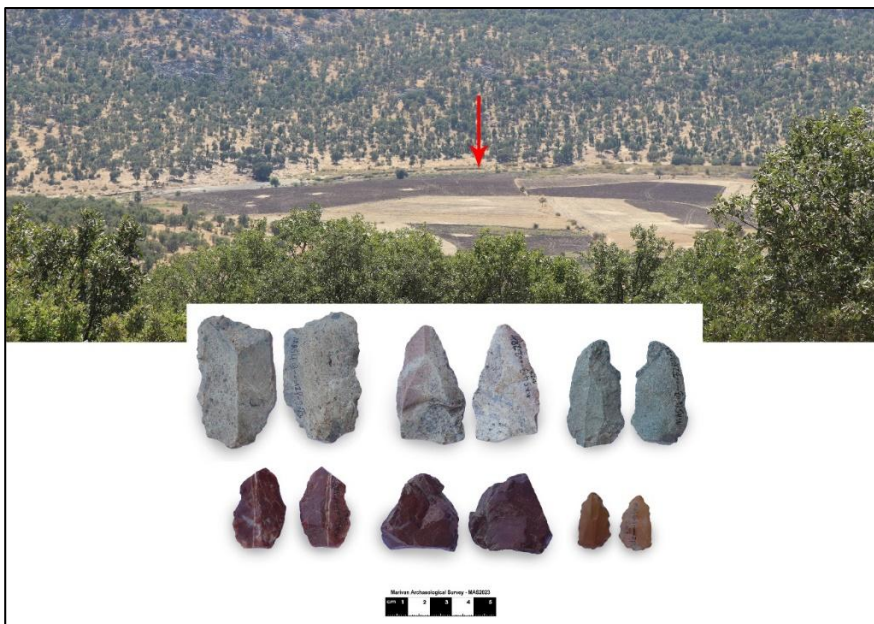


Fig. 10. View of a Palaeolithic open site (MAS.403) and associated stone tools (Site photo by A. Tazik and artifact photo by H. Mohammadpour).

6. Neolithic Period

During two survey seasons in Mariwan region, a single site dating back to Neolithic period was identified. Mohammadifar and Motarjem (2002) also mentioned this site in their research. The Neolithic site, known as Gird-i Aba Sofi Hamomin (Fig. 11), was initially attributed to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. Upon further review, a collection of stone artifacts and several pieces of pottery were discovered on the site surface. Unfortunately, the pottery sherds were significantly damaged and worn. The collected sherds exhibit no resemblance to the

Neolithic pottery, indicating that they belong to a later period.

This site is located near Lake Zaribar, on the fringe of the Central Plain. Significant sedimentation around the lake and industrial agriculture practices in the past two decades have impacted the site. These factors may have led to burial or disappearance of Neolithic sites. Furthermore, constraints in the survey area hindered our team's ability to identify Neolithic sites in the vicinity of Mariwan comparable to those in Kermanshah.



Fig. 11. View of the Gird-i Aba Sofi Hamomin site (MAS.107) and the associated stone artifacts (Site photo by H. Norasi, and artifact photo by A. Habibzadeh).

7. Chalcolithic Period

A total of 24 sites associated with the Chalcolithic period were documented during our survey, demonstrating the region's significance in this era. Notably, no evidence of the Early Chalcolithic phase was found. Data from Middle and Late Chalcolithic phases indicate a substantial increase in settlements during the Late phase compared to the Middle phase. Pottery finds (Fig. 12) suggest that during the

Middle phase, cultures of Northern Zagros and, to a greater extent, Central Zagros influenced the Mariwan region.

During the Late Chalcolithic phase, cultural interactions between Northern Zagros and Northern Mesopotamia intensified, as evidenced by the widespread distribution of Chaff-faced Ware and the emergence of shared material traditions (Rothman, 2001).

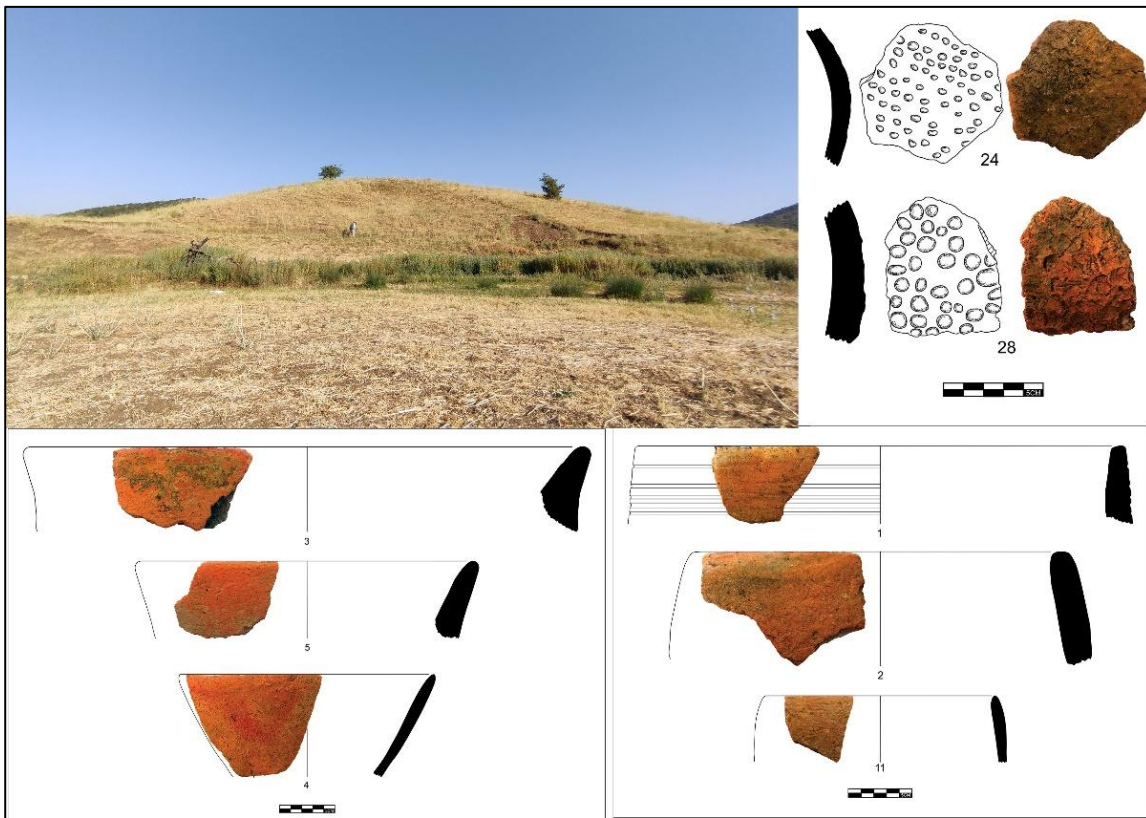


Fig. 12. View of the Gird-i Bapir Agha (MAS.049) and the associated finds (Site photo by H. Norasi and pottery drawing by M. Bayazidi).

8. Bronze Age

During these surveys, seven sites dating back to the Bronze Age were identified. It appears that, for various reasons, including potential climatic or political factors, artifacts from this period are scarce in the Mariwan region. It is also plausible that Bronze Age sites lie outside the area surveyed during

these two seasons, or that our understanding of Bronze Age cultures in the Mariwan region and their pottery assemblages remains limited. Qaleh Naneh is among the prominent sites of this period, where Bronze Age pottery was unearthed (Binandeh, 2018) (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Aerial photograph of the Qaleh Naneh site (MAS.233), along with the finds associated with the site (Aerial photo by H. Faqihzadeh and pottery drawing by Z. Hadi).

9. Iron Age

In western Iran, the Iron Age typically begins around 1250 B.C.E., marking a time of substantial transformations in Southwest Asia (Danti, 2013: 135). To date, scant details have been determined regarding the material culture, settlement patterns, social structures, and how local communities in the Northern Zagros Mountains of Iran adapted to political and economic interactions during the Iron Age (1250–600 B.C.E.) (Masoumian *et al.*, 2025). Most of our information about this period in the Zagros derives from Assyrian cuneiform sources (Balatti, 2017).

Located in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, the Mariwan plain is a fertile expanse that offers a unique window into the strategic approaches adopted by the influential Iron Age rulers who ruled the region from the 9th to 7th centuries B.C.E.

In the 9th century B.C.E., Assyria emerged as a significant empire. Its territories were administered directly from the centre and organized into provinces gradually expanded. By the mid-8th century B.C.E., Assyria annexed parts of the Northern Zagros Mountains. Notably, regions in western Iran, including Mariwan, were incorporated into the

Assyrian provincial system (Frahm, 2017; Radner *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, archaeologists have not yet systematically excavated or surveyed the Mariwan region, which lay along a main communication corridor between Assyria and western Iran, creating a gap in our understanding of relationships between this part of the Zagros and both its east (Iranian Plateau) and west (Assyria). Accordingly, recent archaeological surveys have yielded significant results, particularly regarding the Iron Age.

Artifacts related to the Iron Age have been identified in 110 of the surveyed sites (Fig. 14). This abundance underscores the region's significance during that period. The pottery found at these sites shares similarities in terms of texture, manufacturing techniques, and form with ceramics from well-known Iron Age sites such as Ziwiye (Motamedi, 1995), Zendan-e Suleiman (Thomalsky, 2006), Godin (Gopnik and Rothman, 2011), Noushijan (Young, 1968), Rabat Mound (Kargar and Binandeh, 2009), Hasan Abad in Sanandaj (Radner *et al.*, 2020), and, in some cases, Hasanlu (Danti, 2013; Danti and Cifarelli, 2015). However, alongside these similarities, a noteworthy quantity of local pottery, together with typical pottery of each period, has also been found.

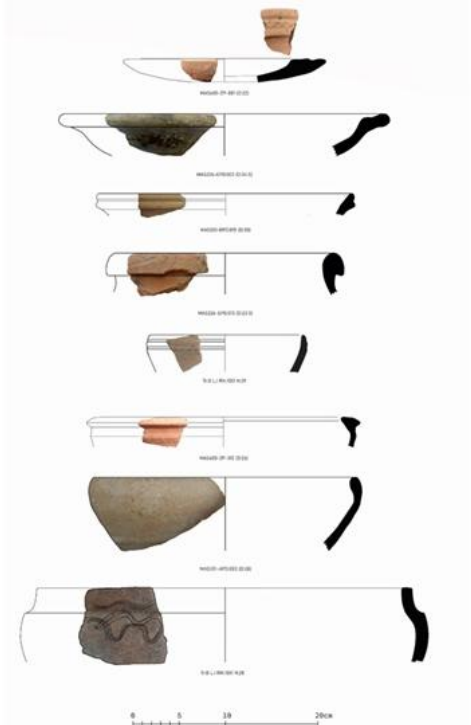


Fig. 14. View of some Iron Age sites in the Mariwan Region and selected ceramic sherds from this region (Site photo by H. Faqihzadeh and pottery drawing by K. Jahangiri and M. Bayazidi).

10. Historical Period

Among identified sites, 121 are attributed to the Historical period (Fig. 15). Jar burials are among the most significant features of this period. Beyond widespread observations across the city, interviews with village residents also confirm the abundance of jar burials in the region. During vineyard cultivation, civil projects, and recovery/exhumation efforts for martyrs' remains, Historical-period cemeteries have suffered damage and destruction. Alongside cemeteries, forts, and residential sites (mounds) also characterize this period.

Identifying pottery from the period poses challenges owing to its similarity to earlier local ceramics. The Historical-period pottery documented during the Mariwan surveys predominantly features mineral temper and falls within a medium-to-coarse

range of manufacturing quality. According to the Munsell color chart, most sherds are reddish in color. The surfaces and cross-sections contain abundant spherical pores. Typical rim forms include double rims and rectangular, thick rims, while plain and triangular rims are also common in the region. Additionally, most bowls are wheel-made, with curved or hemispherical bodies and simple curved or flat rims.

The vessels are coil-built, with rims joined to the bodies at the coil junction. Decorations commonly feature wavy or combed lines, similar to pottery reported from other archaeological sites such as Gird-i Rostam (Potts *et al.*, 2018, p. 120), Tell Sitak (Saber, Hamza, and Altaweel, 2010, Figs. 18–19), Bestansur (Cooper, Rijib, and Ahmed, 2012, Fig. 3), and Qal'eh Yazdgerd (Keall and Keall, 1981).

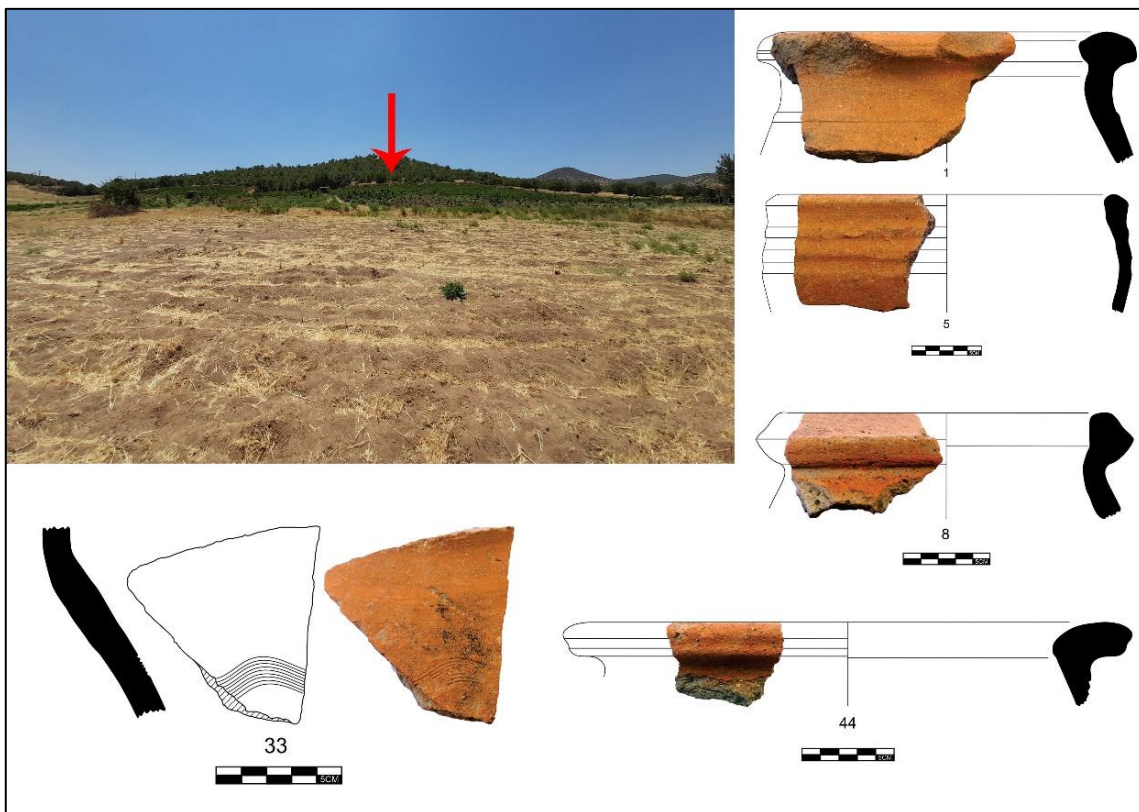


Fig. 15. View of Site 82 (MAS.082) and the associated finds (Site photo by K. Yarali and pottery drawing by M. Bayazidi).

11. Islamic Period

Based on available finds, the Islamic period, with 129 sites, has the highest site count. These include Islamic cemeteries, villages, and forts/castles. Most pottery sherds from this period are handmade and often resemble Historical-period ceramics (Fig. 16). Notably, common Islamic glazed wares are scarce in the region: during the survey, only two very small glazed sherds were recovered among thousands of

artifacts, in contrast to the east of the province, where the Garrus ware (underglaze-painted) tradition is prevalent (Behnia & Zarei, 2023; Sharifi and Zarei, 2021).

The presence of mosques, religious schools (e.g., Qaleh Imam: Karimian, 2014; Karimian and Masoumian, 2016/2017), and cemeteries is a defining feature of this period. Although no carved tombstones have been observed thus far, the arrangement of grave

markers differs by sex: for women, three tombstones (two flanking and one central); for men, two tombstones. Most tombstones are made of shale. Remarkably, these graves still hold profound

sanctity and respect among local communities; over 95% of the sites appear to have remained untouched by grave robbers.

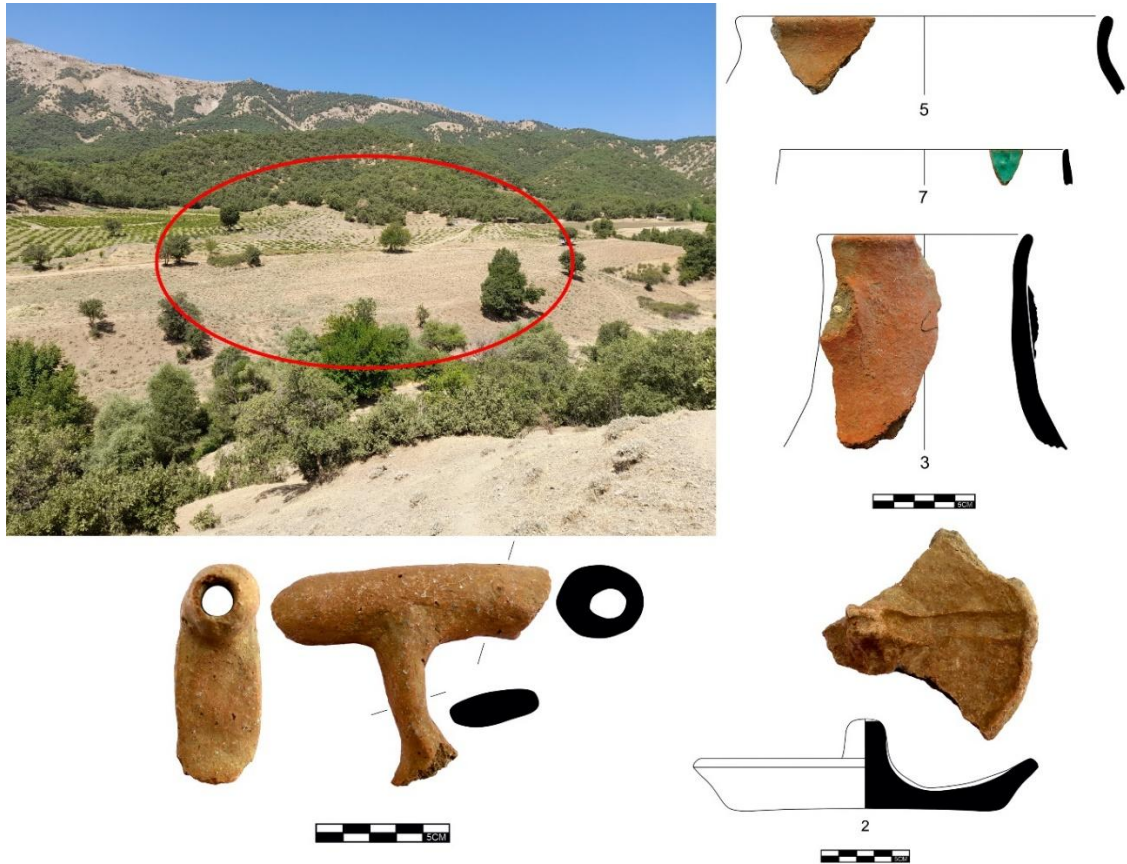


Fig. 16. View of the Dolash Kon 1 site (MAS.125) and the associated finds (Photo by A. Tazik and pottery drawing by Z. Hadi).

12. Conclusion

Two seasons of archaeological survey in Mariwan have unequivocally revealed this region's immense potential. Classification of thousands of stone tools and pottery sherds collected during the surveys indicates that diverse population groups, from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Islamic period, inhabited the region. Despite its significance, Mariwan remains relatively overlooked by archaeologists. One major challenge in Mariwan's archaeological studies is the absence of an absolute chronology and the scarcity of dating results from excavated sites, including Qaleh Naneh and the Zardoian cemetery.

The rich region of Mariwan, located in western Kurdistan Province, holds considerable potential for long-term archaeological research projects. Mariwan

provides a unique opportunity to study both local/indigenous developments and extra-regional relations at the intersection of Mesopotamia and the Zagros across various historical and prehistoric periods. At times, it served as a corridor or intermediary among past civilizations in the Central Zagros, Northern Zagros, and Mesopotamia; at other times, such as the Neolithic period, Bronze Age,¹ and Islamic periods, Mariwan was relatively isolated, with limited connections beyond its geographical and cultural borders.

Based on the evidence, pottery-making traditions are observable at the De Kon site, dating to the late Islamic centuries. Remarkably, these traditions closely resemble Historical period practices, suggesting continuity from earlier periods; that is, the end of a period does not necessarily entail the end

¹ In this region, lack of absolute chronology complicates our understanding. However, compelling evidence of the Bronze Age occupation has been discovered at Gird-i Rostam in Penjwen,

which lies exactly across the Bashmaq border, and is approximately 20 kilometers away from it (Potts *et al.*, 2018: 122).

of a tradition. Among other lines of evidence, the scarcity of Islamic glazed pottery is notable: among thousands of sherds, glazed wares are largely absent. In contrast, in the eastern part of Kurdistan Province, the Garrus (sgraffiato/underglaze-painted) pottery tradition is prevalent.

Given the localized nature of pottery traditions and local production, definitive conclusions regarding the relative dating of certain sites—and comparisons with regions beyond our study area—remain elusive. However, during the Palaeolithic period, Levallois technology was prevalent in stone-tool manufacture, and the dominant cultural attribution is Mousterian, evident on both sides of the region at sites such as Bawa Yawan and Shanidar. Bronze Age pottery traditions show remarkable similarities to assemblages in Sardasht, Rabat, Baneh, and Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the abundance of Iron Age sites and the discovery of an Assyrian inscription at Qaleh Imam offer valuable insights into intercultural interactions and communication networks in the Iranian highlands.

In the Historical period, we discussed the abundance of jar-burial cemeteries. This remarkable phenomenon likely reflects a jar-burial tradition that persisted for over two millennia, from the Iron Age to the end of the Historical period (Masoumian *et al.*, 2026), such that we propose describing Mariwan as a ‘county of jar-burials’ on a provisional basis. Among these cemeteries, a 12-hectare site was identified, but unfortunately, its entire surface was irreparably damaged by unauthorized digging; additionally, a 6-hectare area was destroyed by mechanical excavation carried out by the Martyrs Organization. Relevant institutions must prioritize the preservation and protection of these unique cemeteries.

From the preliminary results of the two survey seasons in Mariwan, several critical points emerge:

- Owing to land privatization and fencing around Lake Zaribar, surveying this region is effectively impossible; archaeologists can only enter under the supervision of licensed construction.
- Lack of public awareness about cultural-heritage laws and site buffers has led to collection and removal of surface cultural materials by farmers before archaeological teams arrive, complicating oversight in multiple cases.
- Approximately 90% of caves and cemeteries have been destroyed. The extent of illicit excavations is so great that a cave like Eshkaft Ben Bard Saro (MAS.133), previously documented by Mohammadifar and Motarjem (Askol), now lacks any ancient deposits; this site, along with many others, has been severely damaged and plundered.

Despite these issues, the region’s border location, marked by turrets and checkpoints, has left many areas comparatively untouched, and numerous sites hold considerable potential for future excavation. Because of the city’s vast extent and richness, and constraints in budget and time, only a limited portion could be surveyed. Given Mariwan’s significant archaeological potential, immediate and sustained efforts are required to protect and preserve its cultural heritage sites from ongoing threats and destruction. We remain hopeful that future endeavors will allow for a comprehensive survey of the remaining areas.

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