PRELIMINARY REPORT OF SURVEY AND SOUNDINGS AT HALIMEHJAN, 1976

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Preface

The Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition, directed by Professor Namio Egami, carried out the five seasons' excavations in Iran during the period of ten years, from 1956 to 1965. After his retirement from the University service in 1967, the members of the mission have engaged themselves in publishing the reports of the excavation work. While they were preparing their reports, Professor Toshihiko Sono, who was one of the most important staff of the mission, died suddenly. His unexpected death has delayed the publication of the reports. The last volume, however, was completed last spring. As a result of the five seasons' work, the mission left 15 volumes of report.\(^{(1)}\)

Within the five seasons, the mission excavated many ancient tombs in the valley of Dailaman, Gilan Province, in 1960 and 1964 (Pl. 1).\(^{(2)}\) To further the problems obtained from Dailaman valley, one of the investigations of the 1976 season necessiated a continuation of Dailaman project. Therefore, the staff of the mission tried to catch up with the information from the neighboring valleys. When Fukai who was later nominated as director of the 1976 season visited Teheran in 1974, Mr. A. Hakemi informed him about Halimehjan, one of the valleys next to Dailaman. Fukai tried in vain to see the site in the summer of 1974. Nevertheless, this valley was hopeful to us, because it was said that the tombs were of the Parthian and/or Sassanian periods.

In the following summer of 1975, Matsutani came to Iran to visit Halimehjan valley.\(^{(3)}\) The villagers told him that they knew many sites of graveyards since they had dug a huge amount of tombs only a few years before, that is,
more than a decade ago. One of the graveyards turned out to be the very site of Halimejan valley as Fukai was previously informed by Mr. Hakemi. The other graveyards have not been known to the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research.

Based on the Matsutani's report, the mission decided to carry out survey and soundings in this valley from 10 June to 31 July, and sent an application letter\(^{(4)}\) to Dr. F. Bagherzadeh on 10 January. We received a letter of approval dated 9 March 1976.

Although twelve members constitute the 1976 mission, ten of them joined to the survey and soundings at Halimehjan valley. They are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Shinji Fukai</td>
<td>history of fine arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Directors</td>
<td>Toshio Matsutani</td>
<td>archaeology</td>
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<td>Members</td>
<td>Katsumi Tanabe</td>
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<td>Sadayuki Watanabe</td>
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<td>Members</td>
<td>Manabu Furuyama</td>
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<td>Yoshimasa Chiyonobu</td>
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<td>Mihoko Domyo</td>
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<td>Akira Hori</td>
<td>archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Toshio Mowuri</td>
<td>physical anthropology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. M. Musavi acted as a representative member of the Center, to whom we would like to record our profound indebtedness for his valuable cooperation based on his long experience in the archaeological field work. Without his kind help we could not have done half of our work.

### Report of Survey

**A. Halimehjan valley (Pl. 2)**

The expected date of initiating the work was 10 June, but the rainfall postponed our schedule. On 15 June, we started our survey in Halimehjan valley under a guidance of a village-master Mr. M. Ziayi. The graveyards known to villagers are altogether seven in number.\(^{(a)}\)

1. **Shahpir (Pl. 9-1)**

   A long tongue-like hill is a graveyard. The tombs are situated along the ridge and slopes of the hill. Most of them had been dug by villagers more than
ten years ago. After the villagers’ digging, the end of the hill was cut by a laying of gas pipe line. The pipe line exploded in the summer of 1974, and burnt the woods away. Now the hill is covered with weeds peculiar to this region, with a growth of 2–3 m in height in the places where excavated dumps are laid, while the ordinary height of the weed is less than 1 m in average. The height of the weed shows us the difference between the excavated and unexcavated areas. A scene of the hill before the explosion must be a shrubbery zone scattered with tall trees, judging from the unburnt area and the size of burnt trees

a. Date: Parthian, Sassanian and Islamic
b. Excavated objects: bronze deer-sculpture, bronze sheep head, carnelian and lapis lazuli beads, pottery in animal form and plain pottery, glass-ware with shell decoration, gold sheep head and iron sword.
c. Structure of tombs: tomb has “tunnel” and depth of it is 1–1.5 m from surface.

2. Ghorsh

It is situated on the slope of the innermost recess of the valley. The slope is thickly covered with trees. Villagers dug among the trees.

a. Date: Ziwieh culture, 7–8 century B.C.
b. Excavated objects: bronze-made decorative head of stick with wings, winged-sheep head, silver bowl, gold ornaments, and ring.
c. Structure of tomb: tomb has ceiling stone.

3. Mahaleh Berenj-zar Ziayi

As the name shows, this site is situated in the middle of paddy fields. It is thought that almost all tombs were destroyed when they opened this area for making paddy fields. A few of the tombs which had narrowly escaped damage were dug. The distribution of the tombs is so small that future excavation is not worthy.

a. Date: Sassanian?
b. Excavated objects: iron sword, plain pottery, glass-ware.

4. Jangal Ashur Mohammad

Here is a steep slope facing the south, which is called divar. Although the
area of graveyard seems to be very large, the exact stretch is unknown because of dense forest and a steep slope.

a. Date: Prehistoric
b. Excavated objects: gold ring for nose, decorative objects made of bronze, bronze sheep head, bronze sword, but no glass-ware.

5. Ghache Sara y Nahd Ali
Most graveyards were destroyed by a pipe line and a truck road, leaving a triangular area bordered by a pipe line and a road. The distribution of tombs must be narrow.

a. Date: Parthian or Sassanian
b. Excavated objects: silver plate, carnelian beads, simple pottery.

6. Razak
On the northern side of Halimehjan valley, there is a big graveyard named Razak. It is in a thick forest and extends from the ridge to the edge of a slope facing the south. Though many tombs were dug by villagers, the area near the higher ridge is untouched.

a. Date: Sassanian
b. Excavated objects: cow-shaped pottery, gold ornament, gold cup, silver bowl, stamp seal, iron sword, glass-ware.
c. Structure of tomb: probably a tomb with passage or of catacomb type, for it is said that the tomb has a “tunnel”.

7. Rud Khan Bare
Near the confluence of Halimehjan river to Sefidrud, a large slope is seen on the south-eastern bank of the river. This large area is a graveyard. Villagers dug about a hundred of tombs here.

a. Date: Prehistoric
b. Excavated objects: gold ornament, carnelian beads, copper sword, dark burnished pottery.
c. Structure of tomb: two types; one is a rectangular stone-piled tomb with a stone ceiling. The other pit-tomb, circular or oval in shape, is without a “tunnel”.

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B. Shahran valley (Pl. 2)

We pre-arranged to visit Shahran valley twice on 14 and 20 July, but unexpected rainfall and other reasons counteracted our plan. On 27 July, near the end of our schedule, we could carry out a survey at Shahran valley under the guidance of Mr. Pour Shahrani, a guard belonging to Rudbar Office of Culture and Art.

At Shahran valley three places are known to villagers as graveyards. Except one, they know no other graveyard on the eastern part of Khoshk rud, a tributary water. The exception is Imam-zadeh Mohtasham and the other two are situated near the bank of Sefidrud.

8. Imam-zadeh Mohtasham

Near the top of a thickly wooded mountain, about 300 tombs were dug along the ridge.
   a. Date: Sassanian
   b. Excavated objects: cut-glass with neck, glass rhyton, iron sword, gold-ring, -necklace and -bracelet.
   c. Structure of tombs: tomb has 1–1.5m deep “tunnel” and closing stone at entrance.

9. Lameh-zamin

Large slope on north-eastern side of the confluence is a graveyard. The slope is covered partly with raspberry and other thorned trees, and partly with thick woods. The topological situation is similar to Rud Khan bare in Halimehjan valley. Some of tombs were excavated by Mr. Jawad Babek Rad about seven years ago and Mr. M. Shahidzadeh about five years ago.
   a. Date: Prehistoric
   b. Excavated objects: cow- and sheep-shaped pottery, small decorative pieces of gold, bronze decorative arrow, terracotta goddess- and god-figurine, terracotta-made chariot.
   note: Cautionary note against destroying this site was submitted to Rudbar Office of Culture and Art on 27 July by names of Mr. M. Musavi and Matsutani.

10. Pain Mahaleh Shahran

Opposite the bank of Lameh zamin, there is a narrow graveyard. Nearly
400 tombs were already dug by villagers, and a part of them have been damaged by laying pipe line.

- Date: Prehistoric
- Excavated objects: animal shaped pottery, golden bowls.
- Structure of tomb: walls of tomb are made of stone-pile.

**Report of Soundings at Shahpir**

After surveying Halimehjan valley we have chosen Shahpir as a place for soundings this season. For digging this tongue-shaped hill, we put a grid over the hill.

A. Grid (Pl. 3)

First, we hammered a pile (D. P.) at a point on the ridge. The pile worked not only as the datum point of space but also that of a level. We next put some piles along the ridge so as to make the line straight. The line made by piles is the E-W datum line, which is divided into 2m wide. The each 2m interval from D. P. to the east was marked E1, E2, E3 and so on. Another N-S datum line was set through the D. P. and also divided into 2m wide. Thus, every square of 2m by 2m on the hill is marked: for instance, an area 10–12m north from the D. P. and 50–52m east from the D. P. is Square N6 E26. Squares for finding tombs are set up after this grid system.

B. The places of soundings (Pl. 3)

The first area where we made the soundings was 13 squares or 52m² surrounding Square N10 E7 (Area I). It is situated on a steep slope, and was apparently unexcavated area according to the information obtained from the villagers and by considering the fact that the area was covered with the short weeds. Unfortunately, we could not find any tombs here, but we could know the natural soil stratification.

The natural soil stratification at Shahpir is roughly as follows. The surface (first layer) is dark humus soil. Below the first layer, there lies a dark brown clayish soil which is named the second layer. Those two layers cover the bed rock composed of whitish soft rock. Potsherds were found in quantity both in the first and second layers, but none in bed rock. The first layer shows few differences in locality, while the second one changes so much, especially where the depth is thick, that we can subdivide it. The depth, too, varies from...
0 to 80cm in places. The bed rock is mainly composed of whitish soft rock (probably of gypsum) mixed with greenish sand-stone and chocolate brown clay pebbles.

The most useful results of our labor obtained from Area I was our knowledge of such natural soil stratifications at Shahpir hill, which later helped much of our diggings at another two areas.

Some pottery were found at Area I, besides plenty of potsherds. They are two bowls with carinated body and curved out rim, one small plate, and a fragment of big jar. These pottery all red in color and are completely different from the pottery found in tombs as byburials. All are dug out from a depression on the bed rock. It is supposed that those pottery have flowed in at ancient times.

The next area we tried to find tombs was Area II where we could excavate four tombs.

As the thickness of the second layer prevented us from reaching the first tomb soon, we had carried out another soundings at Area III before we found another tomb at Area II. It is an area on the southern slope near the ridge. We dug 9.5 squares or 38m² which had Square S1 E76 in the center. After exposing the bed rock and checking the surface carefully, we concluded that no tomb had been made in the area and closed the sounding here.

The soundings were done at three areas on Shahpir hill of which only one area yielded tombs.

C. Four tombs in Area II (Pl. 4, Pl. 9–2)

The excavated tombs were four in number, but we found one more tomb, of which the beginning of its passage was discovered while we were digging SP-2. The lack of time could not allow us to dig up this tomb, SP-5.

We named the tomb one by one after our finding. SP-1, -2, -3, -4 are the names of tombs and SP-S1, SP-S2, SP-S3, SP-S4 the numbers of burials respectively.

i. SP-1 (Pl. 10–1)

Although this is the smallest tomb of the four, the entrance of the chamber was closed with stones. An immature body (SP-S1), probably 8 to 10 years old, was buried here without any byburials in chamber. The finds which are supposed to show funeral rites are two fragments of big pottery on passage.

The body is buried in extended form as the other three.
ii. SP-2 (Pl. 10-2)

SP-2 shows two differences from the other three. One is that nothing was put on passage and the other no stone closing at entrance. The entrance was not closed by stone(s), it was assumed, however, there were something perishable which closed entrance according to the observation of soil deposit at passage. As we will mention later, we suppose that the passage was intentionally filled up after burying the dead in chamber. The soil deposit at passage stops at one face which shows the existence of obstacle when the passage was filled with soil.

An adult male (SP-S2) in extended form was found in chamber. The dead had a jar (1) near his head, a bowl (4) (Pl. 8-2) and shallow bowl (3) (Pl. 7-4) together with a fragment of pottery (5) beside his left leg, and a spear (2), of which spearhead (Pl. 12-1) was made of iron, placed on the dead body. Below his head we found a thin (thickness varies 2mm to 4mm) iron fragment which measured 2.7cm long and 1.1cm wide. We have no idea of the use of this piece.

iii. SP-3 (Pl. 5, Pl. 11-1)

About the middle of the passage, we found a bowl with three legs (1) which is not only of the same type but also having the same size as the one found in chamber. A third of the bowl is missing. This is the only one different from the latter.

The buried body was an adult female in extended position. She had an assemblage of three pottery which is composed of a jar (2) (Pl. 7-2), a big mouth jar (4) (Pl. 7-3) and a bowl with three legs (3) near her head. She also wore such personal ornaments as follows: a pair of earrings (12, 13) (Pl. 12-6), a necklace of black fossil wood bead and glass beads (11) (Pl. 12-4), a wristlet of glass beads (10) on left forearm and a chain of five spindle whorls (5-9) (Pl. 8-4~8) on right forearm.

iv. SP-4 (Pl. 6, Pl. 11-2)

The shortness of the passage is the peculiarity of this tomb, but the entrance in general is the same as the others. We found a fragment of big pottery (1) at the passage.

They buried an adult male in chamber with plenty of byburials. A group of three pottery was found near the head: a spouted bowl with three legs (12) (Pl. 8-3), a shallow bowl (13) (Pl. 7-5) and a bowl with three legs (14) (Pl. 8-1). The other pottery, a jar (11) (Pl. 7-1) was found near the left foot.
of these pottery have vertical handles. Byburials other than pottery are two spears (9, 10) (Pl. 12–2) near the right foot, one iron sword (15) (Pl. 12–3) along the left side of the body and a group of glass beads and a pendant (an eye-bead (6) (Pl. 8–10), two twisted beads (7) (Pl. 8–13, 14), one pendant (8) (Pl. 12–5) between the head and three pottery.

The above mentioned objects were found at the original position where they had been placed before. We found some objects which seemed to be forced to move from the original position. Those are a silver ring (2) (Pl. 8–9), one of twisted beads, a glass pendant (3) (Pl. 8–12) and tang parts of iron sword (5, 16). While we were cleaning the filling soil in the chamber, we removed a silver ring, a twisted bead and a part of tang of iron sword, so we could not know the exact positions where they were originally. However, they were all found in an area which was bordered by the right knee. The right foot and the wall of the chamber in space and about 20–30cm above the floor of chamber in level. We could fortunately record and draw the places where the two objects were found. A flat glass bead (4) (Pl. 8–11) was found 30cm above the floor and a part of tang of iron sword (16) was found attached to the wall about 20cm above the floor. Not only these objects but also some bones of the left hand, the neck and rib were found in the area. A few bones attached to the wall were left in situ; we took photographs and made a drawing (Fig. 8). Moreover, a tooth of upper jaw was found near knees.

To put these facts together, we can imagine that this change of disposition was caused by the shock when the closing stone had fallen down. It seems curious to imagine such a case, but this is the most reasonable explanation we could think of. If all the left hand bones were found together near the foot, another explanation should have been given, for example a cut left hand was put beside one of the feet. Some hand bones were, in fact, left in the original place next to the forearm. According to this assumption, the lower part of the body had been covered earlier than the upper part, with soil fallen down from the ceiling. The unevenness of speed in covering the body seems difficult to have happened. The slanting floor of this chamber (see section drawing along the long axis in Pl. 4: the difference of height is about 30cm), however, reinforces to suppose such an unevenness of covering at the time when the closing stone fell down.

D. The structure of the tomb and the way of inhumations at Shahpir

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Four excavated tombs and one tomb of which a part of passage was known, show close similarity in structure. This type of tomb can be called a grave with sloping passage.

First of all, a sloping passage was dug until the depth of front wall reached 125–140cm. Though the length of passage differs from 175cm (SP–4) to 270cm (SP–3), the depth of the front wall is the same, i.e. about 130cm in average. It is supposed that this depth was needed to dig out a chamber.

Then an entrance was opened and an underground chamber was dug out. After the grave was prepared, the dead was buried with the byburials in chamber. Inhumation was completed by closing the entrance with stones or wooden board(s) and filling the passage with soil, sometimes putting broken pottery or potsherds at passage.

The chamber was not filled with soil at the beginning. With the lapse of time, the loose ceiling slowly suffered damage, and eventually the soil from it covered the dead body (or skeletons) and the objects. In the process of its slow and steady collapse through the ages, this process continued until it could no longer support the weight of the stones which rested on the ceiling. The violent impact of the fall of standing or piled stones might have caused disorder in the chamber, resulting in misplacement of some bones and other objects, as is well illustrated at SP–4. At the same time it destroyed a part of ceiling. In the case of SP–2 which had no stone-closing, the ceiling was rather kept well in condition. Needless to say, the collapse of the ceiling continued until the chamber was filled up with loose soil. This process was continuous and the flow of the soil from the upper layer filled the empty space which the fallen stones had occupied earlier.

E. Date of tombs

The date of these four tombs can be tentatively said to be earlier Parthian or 3–1 century B.C. This assumption is made by the evidence of two types of objects: one is an eye-bead found at SP–4 and the other jars found at SP–3 and SP–4. More exact dating will be given after a detailed comparative study of the objects has been made.
Notes

(1) *The Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition Reports* contain three volumes of the reports of excavations at Telul eth-Thalathat, a group of ancient mounds, west of Mosul, Iraq.

(2) The reports are published as *Dailaman I-IV* in four volumes.

(3) Fukai was scheduled to come but could not because of illness.

(4) The letter included a request to conduct the survey at Taq-i-Bustan as well.

(5) As this area is completely covered with woods, it is impossible to survey the sites by ordinary methods usually used in the dry steppes or deserts.

(6) Islamic tombs are restricted to the ridge of the end of the hill.

(7) We only show the items the village-master informed of. The category “plain pottery” seems to be the one which excludes pottery in animal form.

(8) Villagers call passage or shaft “tunnel”. It is difficult to distinguish.
Table 1. Burials and byburials

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<th>TOMB NO.</th>
<th>BURIED BODY</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP-1</td>
<td>SP-S1</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP-2</td>
<td>SP-S2</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP-3</td>
<td>SP-S3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP-4</td>
<td>SP-S4</td>
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Table 2. Some measurements of graves

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<th>TOMB NO.</th>
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<th>CHAMBER</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>depth</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP-1</td>
<td>245 (1.96)</td>
<td>125 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP-2</td>
<td>268 (2.06)</td>
<td>130 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP-3</td>
<td>270 (1.93)</td>
<td>140 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP-4</td>
<td>175 (1.40)</td>
<td>125 (1.00)</td>
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* SP-2 has no closing stone at entrance.
Pl. 1  Map of a part of Gilan Province
Pl. 2 Graveyard sites in Halimehjan and Shahran Valleys

- Graveyard
- Village
- Rice field

1. Shahpir
2. Ghorsh
3. Mahaleh Berenj-zar Ziayi
4. Jangal Ashur Mohammad
5. Ghache Sara y Nahd Ali
6. Razak
7. Rud Khan Bare
8. Imam-zadeh Mohtasham
9. Lameh Zamin
10. Pain Mahaleh Shaharan
Pl. 4 Excavated four tombs at Area II
Pl. 5 Tomb SP-3
Pl. 6 Tomb SP-4
Pl. 7 1 Jar (SP-4-11) 2 Jar (SP-3-2) 3 Jar (SP-3-4)
4 Bowl (SP-2-3) 5 Bowl (SP-4-13)
Pl. 8

1. Bowl (SP-4-14)
2. Bowl (SP-2-4)
3. Bowl (SP-4-12)
4-8. Spindle whorls (SP-3-5-9)
9. Silver ring (SP-4-2)
10. Eye bead (SP-4-6)
11. Flat bead (SP-4-4)
12. Pendant (SP-4-3)
13, 14. Twisted bead (SP-4-7)
Pl. 9-1 Shahpir hill (from north)

Pl. 9-2 Area II (after excavation)