

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON
OF EXCAVATION OF THE IRANIAN-ITALIAN
JOINT EXPEDITION IN KHUZESTAN
AT KAL-E CHENDAR, SHAMI (6TH CAMPAIGN, 2013)

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THE *Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan* started excavation at Kal-e Chendar, a village located in the valley of Shami, in nowadays Khuzestan, on October 2013. This project, which falls within a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Seyyed Mohammad Behesthi for the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (RICHT-ICAR), and Vito Messina for the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia, or Centro Scavi di Torino (CRASST), furthers the research on ancient Elymais carried out by the expedition since 2008.¹ Other institutions involved in the project are the Dipartimento di Studi Storici, Università di Torino (DSS), and the Dipartimento di Architettura e Design, Politecnico di Torino (DAD). The expedition is also supported in Khuzestan by the Ayapir Cultural Heritage NGO.² The first season of excavation at Kal-e Chendar (6th campaign) followed a survey conducted on the site in 2012 (5th campaign), which was motivated by, and based on, the work of Sir Aurel Stein.

INTRODUCTION

On January 1936, the famous explorer Aurel Stein, informed of the accidental discovery of outstanding antiquities in the village of Kal-e Chendar, in the valley of Shami (FIG. 1), visited the site for conducting excavation there: his interest was attracted by some fragments of marble sculptures dated from the Hellenistic to the Parthian period,³ and a well preserved bronze statue, portraying a nobleman in Parthian dress,⁴ which were shown to him in the nearby city of Izeh (ancient Mal-e Mir) and are now in the Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran.

Stein, accompanied and assisted by the Iranian inspector Bahman Karimi,⁵ remained few days on the site and brought to light the remains of a rectangular enclosure built on stone foundations, a rectangular baked brick platform, and several stone bases, which appeared to be the support of ancient statues now lost (FIG. 2).⁶ Both the structures and findings induced him to identify the site as

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¹ The expedition conducted four campaigns of survey, laser-scanner acquisition and excavation at Hung-e Azhdar, between 2008 and 2011: an open-air mountainous sanctuary was discovered, in which rock reliefs of the old-Elamite and Parthian periods were dedicated (MESSINA ed. 2015).

² The expedition is co-directed by Vito Messina and Jafar Mehr Kian. All the authors of this preliminary report were members of the first season of excavation at Kal-e Chendar (6th campaign).

³ The first study on these sculptures was published by Franz Cumont (CUMONT 1939), but see more recently KAWA-

MI 1987; 59-64, 169-174; MATHIESEN 1992, 165-168; SARKHOSH CURTIS 1993.

⁴ This statue is widely published (see for all KAWAMI 1987, no. 8, pl. 11, and MATHIESEN 1992, 166-167).

⁵ On Bahman Karimi see CURTIS, PAZOOKI 2004, 23-25.

⁶ Aurel Stein's report on his 1936 excavation at Kal-e Chendar was published in 1940 (STEIN 1940, 141-159): this was based on the notes he took on his diaries almost daily, accompanied by a series of pictures of fieldwork (of which only two were published) and a contour line map of the area. Stein could survey the site only preliminarily, however: several ruins and a number of ancient graves are mentioned in his report but not precisely recorded and placed on his map (*Ibidem*, 157-158, plan 10).

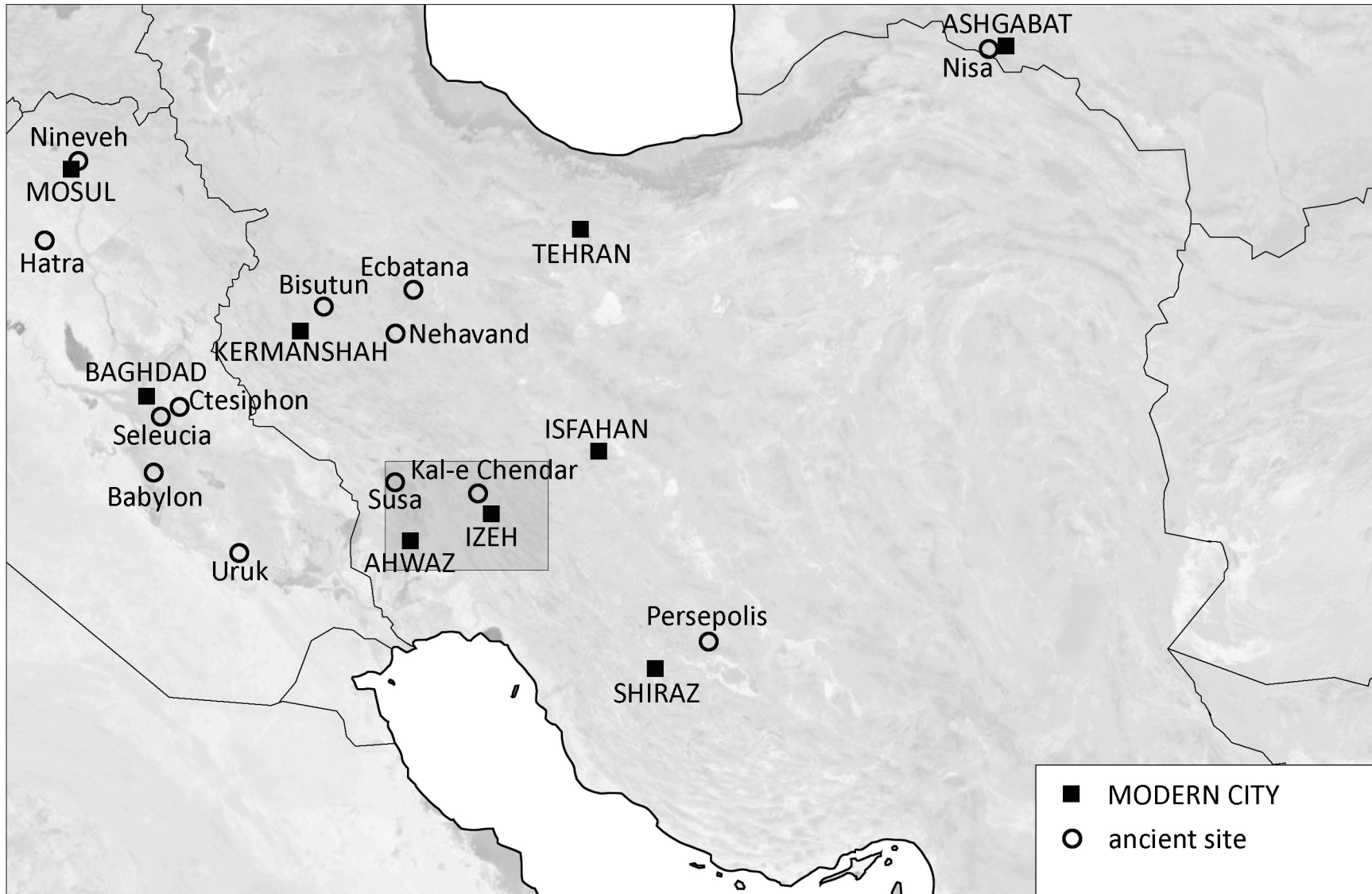


FIG. 1. Map of Iran. Location of Kal-e Chendar in the highlands of Khuzestan (the inset is detailed on FIG. 3).