

# Identifying the Newfound Sites in the Southern District of the Qazvin Plain, and Its Implications for Understanding How the Region Transformed in the Iron Age

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## Abstract

The Qazvin Plain, located in the Central Iranian Plateau, is ripe with historical artifacts, and significant investigations and excavations have been conducted there. Those efforts are notable for revealing pre-historic sites with cultural continuity, dispersed across the southern district of the Qazvin Plain and dating back from the Paleolithic Period to the Historic Period. However, some questions and ambiguities regarding the Iron Age sites still remained that led me to explore the region. The results of this investigation include identifying and introducing several sites from the Iron Age and the transitional era to the Historic Period, which shows that there are far more Iron Age sites in the region. Moreover, the identification of vast sites in that region suggests that centers of culture may have moved in the Iron Age. It also implies that as the Iron Age transitioned into the Historic Period and governments formed in the Central Iranian Plateau, the ways of communication between the settlements changed, and the communities expanded along a straight line and became of importance.

**Keywords:** Qazvin Plain; Bronze Age; Iron Age; Settlement Pattern

## Introduction

The southern district of the Qazvin Plain, constituting the Buin Zahra County, stretches naturally along the Qazvin Plain, which is located in the southern part of the Qazvin Province and covers an area of 2323 sq. km, equal to 14.76% of the province area (Figure 1).

The first series of archeological investigations and excavations in Buin Zahra, specifically Sagz Abad, were conducted by Belgian and Japanese teams in the late 1960s [1]. Later, in 1968, Amir Mahani, the then-president of the Qazvin Department of Culture and Art, made some archeological speculations regarding Tepe Sagz Abad [2]. This was followed by a series of regular investigations by University of Tehran from August 1950 to 1979. After years of hiatus, the excavations were resumed and continue to this day (2016).

The periodical discovery of artifacts in the Sagz Abad site and the surrounding sites, along with the related reports, brought more attention to the region and led to further investigations and excavations in the nearby areas, which, in turn, distinguished different pre-historic ages there. Those efforts generated several reports and articles, including: An investigation of the Mohammad Abad site, by Houshang Sobouti [3]; Archeological investigations of the Qazvin Plain, by Hassan Fazeli Nashli [4]; Archeological investigations of Buin Zahra and Avaj [5]; An investigation of the ancient sites on the mountains of the southern Qazvin Plain (Buin Zahra) [6]; Gradual evolution of economic life in the Qazvin Plain [7]; Metallurgy technologies of the Bronze and Iron Ages in Tepe Sagz Abad [8]; Determining how metal objects were made in the Iron Age [9]; Radiocarbon dating of the Iron Age Sagz Abad, by Pollard and colleagues [10]; Excavations in and speculations about

Tepe Sagz Abad, by Niknami [11, 12]. However, despite the existing reports, some ambiguities regarding the settlements in the Bronze and Iron Ages and also regional transformations still persisted, which called for a revisiting and further investigation of the region.



**Figure 1:** The map of Qazvin province and the location of Buin Zahra town.

In order to do so, I took into consideration the existing findings and data, and revisited the region. In addition to revisiting the previously-discovered Iron Age sites, I identified several more. This investigation yielded interesting results.

### Identifying and introducing newfound Iron Age sites

The investigation in the southern district of the Qazvin Plain (Buin Zahra County) identified 7 Iron Age sites, some of which were previously introduced and some, including the sites Sakhs Abad and Joharin, were identified and introduced for the first time [13].

The Tepe Sakhs Abad site contains earthenware dating back to the Iron Age phases 1-3 (1500-330 BC), suggesting that it was a residential area during the aforementioned time span. Also, the Yas Tepe Joharin site, constituting the northernmost of the Iron Age settlement sites in the region, exhibits earthenware from the Bronze, Iron, and Historic Ages, and seems to be the largest settlement site in Buin Zahra [13], which makes it immensely important for laying out the settlement pattern in the region. In the

process, sites such as Doran Abad, which were previously explored only briefly, were investigated comprehensively. The cultural items and the surficial distribution of earthenware found in the region showed that, in line with Fazeli Nashli's report, the Doran Abad site exhibits a cultural continuity from the Chalcolithic Period to the Iron Age [14] (Figure 2).

In addition to the Iron Age sites, the investigations also revealed a number of Bronze Age sites, such as Doran Abad, Sagz Abad, and Yas Tepe, which refutes Talae's claim that there are no Bronze Age sites in the Qazvin Plain [15]. The significance of this becomes clearer by a possible discovery of other Bronze Age sites in the region.

Considering that the existing theories about the region during the Bronze and Iron Ages are based on the findings and data generated by archeological investigations, excavations and tests performed in Sagz Abad, the discovery and introduction of the newfound sites, including such large sites as Yas Tepe Joharin, may bring about changes in theories about the state of the region during the Iron Age (Figures 3&4).



Figure 2: The location of the areas of the iron Age in the southern district of the Qazvin Plain.

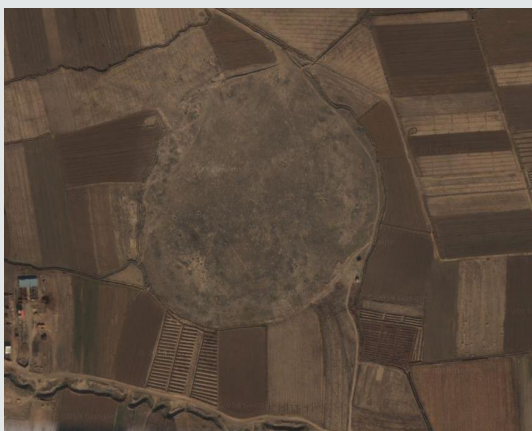


Figure 3 & 4: perspective and the aerial view of Yas Tepe site of the Bronze and Iron Ages and possibly the early historic age.

What my recent investigation revealed is that, generally, the sites identified so far have gone through extensive leveling and farming that was done in the region, and some of them are highly likely to have even turned into agricultural lands through the leveling. Therefore, if we consider the number of the identified sites, it will become clear that because of its location and age as a settlement, Tepe Sagz Abad was the central area, with clusters of smaller sites encircling it at distances ranging from about 1-15 km. Nevertheless, taking into account the competition theory, the fact that the central sites may have moved, and also biological changes, it is possible that the central district moved in different periods, and

it seems that a tendency to settle in regions further north appeared in the transitional period from the Iron Age phase 3 to the Historic Period.

The identification and introduction of Yas Tepe, a larger site that is located further north, showed a cultural continuity from the Bronze Age through the Iron Age and into the Historic Period. It also revealed that while the Sagz Abad and Doran Abad sites became less populated and eventually unpopulated in the Historic Period, the great Yas Tepe Joharin site remained a residential area. This is important for exploring the pattern of the Historic Period settlements in the Central Iranian Plateau (550 BC-652 AD).

As another conclusion that can be drawn from the investigations, it seems that in the late Iron Age and the early Historic Period, the residents of the southern district of the Qazvin Plain became interested in living in the sites further north. According to the observations, most of these sites, such as Sagz Abad, became less populated or even abandoned from the late Iron Age to the early Historic Period. Instead, the Yas Tepe site, a vast area located north of the aforementioned areas, shows evidence of cultural continuity in the Historic Period.

Identifying sites such as Sakhs Abad and, especially, Yas Tepe Joharin allow us to better explore the migration of nomadic peoples. The changes and innovations in earthenware, architecture, population composition as well as diet during the Iron Age are among the factors considered to have led a group of archeologists to raise the possibility that outsiders may have entered the region in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, which is in contrast to the cultural continuation view held by another group. I personally agree with the former theory, and believe that since the newfound site Yas Tepe Joharin shows evidence of cultural continuity from the Bronze Age to the Historic Period, it can be considered as a rare settlement site in the Central Iranian Plateau that can shed light on the state of the region in the Iron Age and how its residents came into contact with itinerant newcomers.

## The state of the region from the late Iron Age to the Historic Period

Another finding of my investigation was that near the Yas Tepe site, which is located north of the other Iron Age sites, there are sites dating back to the Iranian Historic Period—the immediate stage after the Iron Age—lined up from east to west. Previously registered and reported by the Qazvin Province Department of Cultural Heritage, these sites are considered to be important. The importance of the east-west route, which passes by the Yas Tepe settlement site, in the Historic period is suggested by the cultural-historical sites that have similar linguistic names and are lined on both sides of that route. These sites include: Tepe Spervarin; the city of Ardagh; the hills of Valazjerd; Brick Minaret in Khorramabad; the villages Dastjerdak, Bazamjerd, and Kachaleh Gerd; the Historic-Period hills of Nosratabad, the Historic-Period site of Hoseynabad, Abyek; and the large site of Hezar Jolfa. The modern city of Qazvin, which survives from the Historic Period, is located 20 km north of the east-west route, and was built there because of the location's strategic advantage.

Khorramabad's Brick Minaret serves as the marker of the east-west route and leads to the great hill of Valazjerd. "Balashgerds," also known as "valazjerd," were a series of towns that could be used as settlements on main routes by governments to assert authority, control resources, maintain relative stability, and expand trade [16]. The Iron-Age/Historic-Period great hill of Yas Tepe is

next on the east-west route, less than 3 km away from Valazjerd to the east.

According to Diakonoff, Assyrian texts describe the Qazvin Plain, then a part of the Lesser Media, as "the land of the Rudaks." [17] The Plain also constituted a part of the Median province of Nishesha, which, Diakonoff notes, was located just outside of Qazvin. Studying Assyrian inscriptions, he also mentions different cities from the Median period, located in the Qazvin Plain, some of which may be identified.

Thus, considering what was discussed about the linear settlement pattern from the early Historic Period, it seems that the Sagz Abad site, which by then had gone through a transitional period from feudalism, had to not only survive environmental conditions, but also play a role to prove its presence and worth. In that period, strategic advantage in trade as well as war, communication, assisting the central government, and, in turn, receiving financial and military support from the central government played an influential role [18]. It goes without saying that those cities and settlements which not only survived environmental changes, but also were able to communicate efficiently—to both fulfill their own needs and aid the central government—raised in importance; cities that were less involved in communications became less important. Looking at Yas Tepe Joharin, it appears that settlements dispersed and expanded in regions further north, in proportion to environmental conditions and their capacity to fulfill their needs and communicate; linearly arranged, they grew to become new cities.

## Conclusions from the evidence of settlement in the southern district of the Qazvin Plain

As there were some ambiguities regarding the state of the southern district of the Qazvin Plain during the Bronze and Iron Ages, I conducted an investigation, which yielded intriguing results.

In the process of this investigation, a number of not-previously-identified Iron Age sites, such as Tepe Doran Abad, Tepe Sakhs Abad, and Yas Tepe Joharin, were introduced, which proved very helpful in clarifying the ambiguities and also laying out the settlement pattern in the region. However, the issue of extensive farming and leveling of the sites as well as deposition should also be taken into account.

Studying the transitional period from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age found some kind of cultural continuity in the sites Ghara Tepe Sagz Abad, Tepe Doran Abad, and especially the 14-hectare (~34.6-acre) Yas Tepe Joharin.

The settlement pattern seen in the identified sites shows that the sites dispersed in clusters in the Iron Age, while the central point of this pattern possibly moved between the sites Doran Abad, Sagz Abad, and Yas Tepe during that same period. In the late Iron

Age, when the great civilizations of the Historic Period were soon to emerge, the residents of that region left those sites for regions further north and settled in a linear pattern.

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