

## **A Review on Chronology of Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh (Qaleh Kaferun) Relying on the Surface Potsherd**

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Received: 2013/9/27

Accepted: 2014/9/21

### **Abstract**

Kuh-e Khajeh in Sistan, a mesa 120m height in respect of Sistan plain flat, is located 20 Km south-west of Zabol. This is one of most important historical area in Sistan. In account of its religious and political importance, a series remarkable of structures were built on its flat surface and eastern slight slopes since very ancient times. Despite of the studies of archaeologists and scholars, there have been provided no certain chronology about it and a few studies which have been done are merely based on the architecture of this site.

In this research, based on the pottery data it is tried to make a relative chronology on palace of Kuh-e Khajeh. In doing so, the required data was gathered under systematic survey method in the castle's area. Considering that the recognizing the potteries' specifications is an important task in the archaeological studies, therefore, the study of potteries' specifications was given a specific priority. And in doing so, the collected remarkable potteries from the site were classified and typologically studied, accordingly.

According to the results obtained from the typology of potteries, Kuh-e Khajeh palace has had three different settlement phases: the first was Parthians, the second was Sassanids and the third was known to be the Islamic phase (6-8 AH centuries), respectively.

**Keywords:** Sistan, Kuh-e Khajeh palace, Qaleh Kaferun, pottery of Sistan, Parthian era, Sassanid era .

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## Introduction

Kuh-e Khajeh of Sistan because of its high altitude (compared to low-lying plain of Sistan) and being surrounded by Hamoon lake's waters is featured to have an outstanding significance and position. Since old times to present, it was an appropriate place to construct various buildings.

According to archaeological study conducted by the researchers in Kuh-e Khajeh and its surrounding region, 11 monuments and architectural structures were identified that among the most important ones, a great multi-sectional monument can be mentioned on southern side of the mountain known as Qaleh Kaferun. This monument has been paid a specific attention by the explorers and the archeologists as the most prominent monuments of Kuh-e Khajeh. And the most important archaeological activities done on the western north side of Sistan are dedicated to it. One of the most important issues and questions arisen about this monument set is to determine the establishment(s) period date that there have been provided various viewpoints about it which were based on the study and architectural style of this monument. But to present, there has been no serious and practical study about its cultural materials especially the pottery. Since, the researchers with the aim of determining the relative chronology of this great monument conducted a on the surface pottery samples study and typological comparison on every of them. In doing so, the various pottery samples were collected from different sections and then they were documented and with an absolute precision they were compared to all similar items having precise dateline that the relative chronology of the establishment periods of

this area was obtained by the researchers.

## Topographical description of Kuh-e Khajeh

Kuh-e Khajeh is a geographical feature in Sistan plain with 120m height from the sea level where the diagonal axis is 2-2.5 km (Alaei Taleghani, 2005: 214). This single and rocky mountain is from black basalt and it appears as trapezoid from distance (Fig. 1). As a consequence of the volcanic activities under water, Kuh-e Khajeh is a domical outline from the lake alluvium which was pushed upward (Hantington, 1999: 525).

In the past, the mountain was surrounded by water and the local people in order to come to the area used a small reed boats named "Tootan". As it can be seen from far distance, the mountain form is not a plain and flat cone, but it is formed of hard black rocks with stripped body, while it is not accessible peripherally (Afshar, 1955 :538).

The appropriate conditions of Kuh-e Khajeh resulted formation of magnificent mud brick architecture. According to investigations, the remains on the site are palace and temple (Qaleh Kaferun), Qaleh Kok-e Kohzad, Khajeh Ghaltan shrine, Pir-i- Gandom Berian, single mausoleum structures and the Islamic graves (Banijamali, 2009).

Kuh-e Khajeh's palace and temple are considered as the masterpieces among the Iranian architectural masterpieces. The palace is on the southern slope where it is also known as Qaleh Kaferun, Qaleh Se-Majus, Qaleh Rostam or Qaleh Ghahghaheh. Herzfeld believes that the castle is consisted of palace and temple and he refers to them as royal structures (Herzfeld, 2003:299). The palace structure is on the summit of the castle while its

main entrance is at the southern side. The gate arch is relatively high with 7m height. Unfortunately, the gate has been collapsed and the remains are just pillars and parts of arch base. There is central yard after gate with 31×19 m dimensions (Fig. 2). At the northern side, there can be seen cell like rooms with arched ceilings, two broad porticos at eastern and western sides that are symmetrical. The palace main section is at northern side of the yard and behind porches in form of a vast corridor with 250×50 CM dimension where known as painting gallery because of wall paintings. There is a staircase at northeastern most of the gallery, as a passage to upper floor where is constructed on a terrace. Herzfeld believes the space is a temple especially a fire one, for it is located at northern most and highest floor of the structure and there were fire altar foots under the domical ceiling (Fig. 3) (Herzfeld, 1975: 120). Seemingly, Kuh-e Khajeh palace was a luxurious one decorated with wall paintings and mud glyphs. However, there is no trace of them and just in painting gallery tiny patches of colors can be seen.

#### **The history of the archaeological study of Kuh-e Khajeh palace**

For the first time, Sir Aurel Stein, Hungarian archaeologist, visited Kuh-e Khajeh in Sistan, at 1915. He attributed Qaleh Kaferun to the Parthians and the Sassanids. On the other hand, he believed that it was affected by the central Asian Buddhist art.

German archaeologist and scholar, Ernest Herzfeld, investigated the structure in 1925 and 1929. Unfortunately, he never disseminated the excavations reports. Information about the excavations in Kuh-e Khajeh was revealed from his books and articles concerning different aspects of the

Iranian culture and civilization. He disseminated the known paintings' images from the site while he dated them to the Parthian and the Sassanid periods (Herzfeld, 2003).

An Italian expedition under Georgiou Gullini, visited the area at 1961, and published his work in a book named *Kuh-e- Khajeh* in 1964 (Gullini, 1964). Gullini's work in Kuh-e Khajeh was resulted to a new conclusion and suggesting the stratigraphy. He excavated several trenches in the central yard and identified six strata and 4 settlement phases, according to available stratigraphy in test trenches. The stratum 6 is the oldest stratum dated to Achamenids period, and based on the mud bricks used in the structure and the recovered painted potsherds made such dating. The fifth stratum is the Parthian (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), whereas the 3<sup>rd</sup> was assigned to early Sassanids (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) and 2<sup>nd</sup> stratum dated to late Sassanids (6<sup>th</sup> century AD). The latest stratum, Islamic, was assigned to 15<sup>th</sup> AD century. However, Gullini's dating never has been accepted and was criticized at the same time. Among critiques were Jozepe Tuchi and Claus Schippman (Ghanimati 2001: 119,120).

According to Herzfeld and Stein, Kawami also conducted new researches on recovered paintings from Kuh-e Khajeh. She suggested two cultural phases in the site. First phase is 3 & 4 centuries AD which means early Sassanids whereas the latter was assigned to early Islamic (Kawami 1987: 25-23).

By Islamic revolution emergence, all the activities of the foreign archaeological expeditions stopped including those in Sistan. It was so until Seyyed Mahmood Mousavi with an Iranian expedition excavated Kuh-e Khajeh since 1992 till 1994 in three seasons

aimed teaching the HECCH<sup>5</sup> students. The excavation results disseminated as an article titled “*The mud brick monument of Kuh-e Khajeh of Zabol*”. He says nothing about his idea on settlement phases in the structure, but comparing two recovered plasterwork with Herzfeld’s, dates them to Parthian period (Mousavi 1995,: 86-89).

At 1997 AH, Dr. Seyyed Sajjadi dug test trenches for one season alongside with Shahr-i- Sokhta second round excavations. His main goal was preparing the site to be reconstructed (Seyyed Sajjadi, 2007: 83).

The last scientific activity was an archaeological survey at summer 2007 following preparing comprehensive archaeological atlas when there were recognized 17 archaeological sites (Mousavi Haji & Mehr Afarin, 2006).

### **The systematic survey aims at Kuh-e Khajeh**

As mentioned earlier, despite of the archaeological excavations at Kuh-e Khajeh palace, a certain chronology has not been suggested and what have been said was based on architectural evidence. Consequently, there have not been any research and chronological suggestion on pottery evidence. However, the present paper attempts to chronicle the site, relatively, according to pottery data.

### **Sampling method**

The sampling method used to sample the cultural material available at the site was random sampling method. In order to achieve the objectives, the site was divided into eight sections according to the main and subsidiary directions. Then the crew surveyed each section to sample characteristic material culture while walking to and fro. During the

stage, characteristic potsherds such as rim, handle, foot, bottom, painted and glazed shreds, being important in recognition the site, were collected into fustian bags. Then, collected shreds were carried to the site central point to be classified into characteristic types. At the second stage, similar superfluous shreds were scattered on their original locations for future researchers.

### **Pot shred classification**

Sampling and systematic survey in the site caused a great amount of shreds, including assemblages of rims, bottom, glazed and decorated bodies to be collected (Figures 4-5). According to coats, being plain or painted, collected shreds can be categorized into four groups:

#### 1-. Plain unglazed pottery

They are with no design and decoration. In the category, shreds clay is red, red brown, buff, brown, orange, and gray. The slip is buff-colored, red brown, brown, orange, or gray as well.

#### 2-. Unglazed painted pottery

In the category, slip is clayey and the clay itself is red, orange, gray, dark brown, or buff. The pottery of this category can be subdivided into three groups:

- a. Incised designed pottery
- b. Burnished designed pottery
- c. Polychrome decorated pottery

The decoration themes in this category are of geometrical type.

#### 3-. Plain glazed pottery

In this category, clay is red brown and buff while potteries are glazed in green, blue, and transparent. The potteries are kilned enough while the clay is dense and solid.

#### 4-. Glazed and painted pottery

The category is subdivided into two subcategories, according to decoration:

- a. pottery with under glazed incised decoration

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b. Pottery with under glazed paintings  
Meanwhile, according to color it is subdivided into green and turquoise groups.

In this category, decoration themes are of geometrical and floral type.

#### **Typological comparison of samples**

The collected samples from Qaleh Kaferun were typologically compared with other sites namely Qaleh-I Yazdigird, Bisotun, Takht-e Soleyman, Dastva, Qaleh Zahak, Kush, Seleucia, AI Khanum, Qumis, Nooshijan, Hegmataneh, Kangavar, Qaleh Sam, Tell-i Malyan, Khorhe, Tihale, Tape Gowri, Bandian Dargaz, Susa, Chogha Mish, Charsada, Zahedan Kohneh and Afghanistan from perspectives of rim, form, clay, temper, and decoration (tables 1-3). In order to study the assemblage morphologically and chronologically the excavated sites were in priority while the surveyed ones were in second priority.

According to the morphological study, the first settlement phase is Parthian. Most of the Parthians' pottery are plain and without any decoration and design. The clay of potteries color spectrum varies from buff to red brown, brick-colored, and dark brown. Potters of the period, generally coat their wares with various slips and paints, however, some of potteries are self-slipped. The characteristic forms of the group are wide opening bowls, punch bowl, chalice, and bowl.

Decorating styles of the period are incising, burnishing, and painting. And artistic themes are geometrical. One of the most common decorating designs is horizontally parallel grooves incised in lower than 0.5cm depth, for such decoration abundance in Sistan's historic pottery is known as "Sistan's grooved style". However, it should be said that such decoration can be seen on the site of other regions through historic period.

The second settlement phase in the region is Sassanids'. The Sassanids' potteries in the region are the Parthians' pottery continuation. Through the period, there is no glazed pottery just same as the previous period, and the potteries wholly are unglazed. Most of the potteries of the period are of the plain type as same as previous period. The colors of the clay are buff, red brown, red and orange which the most usual colors are variations of buff. The decoration is limited to incised and burnished.

Most of the historic potteries of the Kuh-e Khajeh are comparable with the other regions' historic potteries; however, some of the forms are local and can be categorized within Sistan's local potteries.

The last recognized settlement phase in Qaleh Kaferun is the Islamic mediaeval period. The Islamic pottery of the site mostly is glazed including plain and painted glazed pottery. The pottery temper is inorganic and the clay color varies from buff to red. In plain glazed potteries, the colors of glaze are green-blue, cerulean, and dark green. The painted potteries bear decorations such as under glazed paintings and under glazed incised. Among the other decorations on the Islamic period pottery of the site is "grooved incised potteries". The Islamic pottery has infirm and fragile buff color clay while their grooved designs are not so solid and beautiful as well, against Sistan's historic grooved pottery whose clay is solid.

Through the collected potteries morphology there were considered technological characteristic then compared with the pottery of the other sites. The results affected the chronology of this significant site. The comparing items in morphological and chronological tables of the palace of Kuh-e Khajeh are as follow:

A. the coat color, B. temper, C. composition type, D. rate of kiln, E. external slip type, F. decoration type

**Table1-** the Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh potteries typological and chronological comparison

Approximate time	Comparing source	Pottery catalogue (appearance condition, technical characteristic)	Tablet no	Fig. no
Parthian	Keall,1981,F10,no6/33 Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 125, no. 009	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, orange clay slip on external and internal surfaces	1	1
Parthian	Charsada,1962,F33,no 289	Brick color, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, clay slip on internal surface, gray on external surface	1	2
Parthian	Khosrwzadeh and Aali,2004, sketch6, fig. 6 Rahbar, 2003, p. 160, sketch109	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, brick color slip on internal surface and buff on the external surface, incised design (Sistani grooved style) on external surface	1	3
Parthian-Sassanid	Keall,1981,F12,no2/49	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external surface	1	4
Sassanid	Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 124, no. 007	Brick color, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external surface	1	5
Parthian	Charsada,1962,F27,no 220	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, red brick on external and internal surfaces	1	6
Sassanid	Khosrwzadeh and Aali,2004, sketch14, fig. 14	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, red brick on external and internal surfaces	1	7
Sassanid	Kennet, 2002, F.4, no.81	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, red brick on internal and buff on external surfaces	1	8
Parthian	Kleiss,1970, Ab26, no54 ϵ, Sketch 4, fig. 5 Khosrwzadeh and Aali,2004	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, Buff on external surfaces	1	9
Parthian	Haerink,1997, fig. 36, Sketch 8 and fig. 8, sketch 5	Brown, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, thick dark brown slip on internal and external surfaces	1	10
Parthian	Keall,1981,F18,no22/03 Kleiss,1970,Ab26,no29 Charsada,1962,F26,no19 6 Khosrwzadeh and Aali,2004, sketch 3, fig 3 Azarnoosh 2007, Tablet 1, no. 851	Red, inorganic, enough kiln, dark brown on external surface	1	11
Parthian	Haerink,1997, fig. 24, sketch 7	Red brick, wheel made, enough kiln, brick color on external surface, incised (Sistani grooved style)	1	12

**Table2** the Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh potteries typological and chronological comparison

Approximate time	Comparing source	Pottery catalogue (appearance condition, technical characteristic)	Tablet no	Fig. no
Parthian	Azarnoosh, 2007, tablet 2, sketch12; Haerink,1997, fig.1 , sketch 1	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external and internal surfaces	1	13
Parthian	Kleiss,1970,Ab26,no12	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external and internal surfaces	1	14
Parthian	Keall,1981,F20,no21/03 Charsada,1962,F30,no267 Haerink,1997, fig. 36, sketch13	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal and external surface	2	15
Parthian-Sassanid	Haerink,1997, fig. 14, sketch 5 and fig. 36, sketch 5; Rolf,2003, p. 50, sketch 18	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, brown on internal and external surface	2	16
Parthian	Debevois,1934,no 155 Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 127, no. 028	Orange, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, incised decoration on external surface	2	17
Parthian	Kleiss, 1970, Ab.25, no.3 Haerink,1997, , fig. 35, sketch 10 Khosravi2006, fig. 3, sketch 7	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, orange on internal and external surfaces, incised decoration on external surface	2	18
Parthian	Kleiss,1973,Ab22,no26 Mehr Afarin, 2007, P124, no 004 Haerink,1997, fig. 24, sketch 9	Orange, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, orange on internal and external surfaces, incised decoration on internal surface	2	19
Parthian-Sassanid	Alden,1978,F6.no25 Mehr Afarin, 2007, , p. 136, no. 102	Orange, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, orange on internal and external surfaces, burnished decoration on internal surface and incised on external	2	20
Parthian	Rahbar, 2003, p. 149, sketch 5	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external surface	2	21
Parthian	Kleiss,1970,Ab26,no51 Haerink,1997, , fig. 14, sketch 5	Brick color, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal and external surface	2	22
Parthian	Charsada,1962,F30,no269 Haerink,1997, , fig. 14, sketch 5	Red, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, burnished decoration on internal surface	2	23
Parthian	Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 125, no. 010	Brick color, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal and external surface	2	24
Parthian	Kleiss, 1970, Ab.25, no.13	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, red brick on internal and external surfaces, painted rim in brown color	2	25

**Table3-** the Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh potteries typological and chronological comparison

Approximate time	Comparing source	Pottery catalogue (appearance condition, technical characteristic)	Tablet no	Fig. no
Parthian	Kleiss,1973,Ab22,no05 Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 133, no.081 Azarnoosh, 2007, tablet, 2, no. 3	Red, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, thick brown slip on external and red on internal surface	2	26
Parthian	Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 131, no.063 Khosravi2006, fig. 1, sketch 2	Brick color, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal surface	3	27
6-8AH	Mousavi Haji, 2004, tablet 21, sketch 6 and tablet 22 sketch 11	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, dark green glaze on internal and external surfaces	3	28
6&8 AH	Fehervari,2000,no.184, 190	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, turquoise blue glaze on internal and green- blue on external surfaces	3	29
6&7 AH	Mousavi Haji, 2004, tablet 30, sketch 2, and tablet 31, sketches 4&5	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal and green glaze on external surfaces, painting under glaze	۳	30
Parthian-Sassanid	Keall,1981,F25,no2/34	Orange, , inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, orange on internal and external surfaces, incised (Sistani grooved style) on external surface	3	31
Parthian-Sassanid	Keall,1981,F25,no2/34 Haerink,1997, fig. 15, sketch 11 Mehr Afarin, 2007, p. 135, no. 093	Red brick, , inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal surface, incised (Sistani grooved style) on external surface	3	32
Sassanid	Keent,2002,F4,no 81 Rahbar,2006, , tablet19,no3/28	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external surface, pectinal incised on external surface	3	33
Parthian-Sassanid	Moghadam,Miri,2003, F19,no 4 Rahbar,2006, tablet9,no2/4 Mehr Afarin, 2007, p.126, no. 024	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on external surface, wavy incised design on external surface	3	34
6&7 AH	Towhidi,2000,271	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, blue glaze on internal and external surface, black painting under painted glaze	3	35



Early 7 <sup>th</sup> century	Wilkinson,1963,Pl.50	Buff, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, buff on internal surface, transparent glaze on external surface, Cerulean painting under transparent glaze	3	36
6&7 AH	Fehervari,2000:no.244 Rezanezhad,2001, 164, sketches 5&8	Red brick, inorganic, wheel made, enough kiln, brick color on external and internal surfaces, incised decoration on external surface	3	37

**Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, dating Qaleh Kaferun based on the pottery samples is the main aim of the present research. The pottery typological studies in the site showed that there were three different settlement phases. The earliest settlement phase is the Parthian and no remains have been found from previous settlements. At the same time, no historic record was mentioned concerning it. It was a turbulent period where several governments dominated them and the territory was a scene for conflict among different governments. The most critical priority for the local governments was founding

defensive fortified castles to stand on their existence. Qaleh Kaferun, in this period playing its role as a consolidated acropolis was equipped with varieties of facilities and supplies.

The second settlement phase is attributed to Sassanids. There can be seen a recession following this era such that there has been found no pottery on the site and in the region, attributed to that period until the sixth century AH. Again, the third phase of settlement started in this palace with a long interval since 6-8 centuries AH and in a small scale it endured for two centuries (Banijamali, 2009, 62).

Plate 1

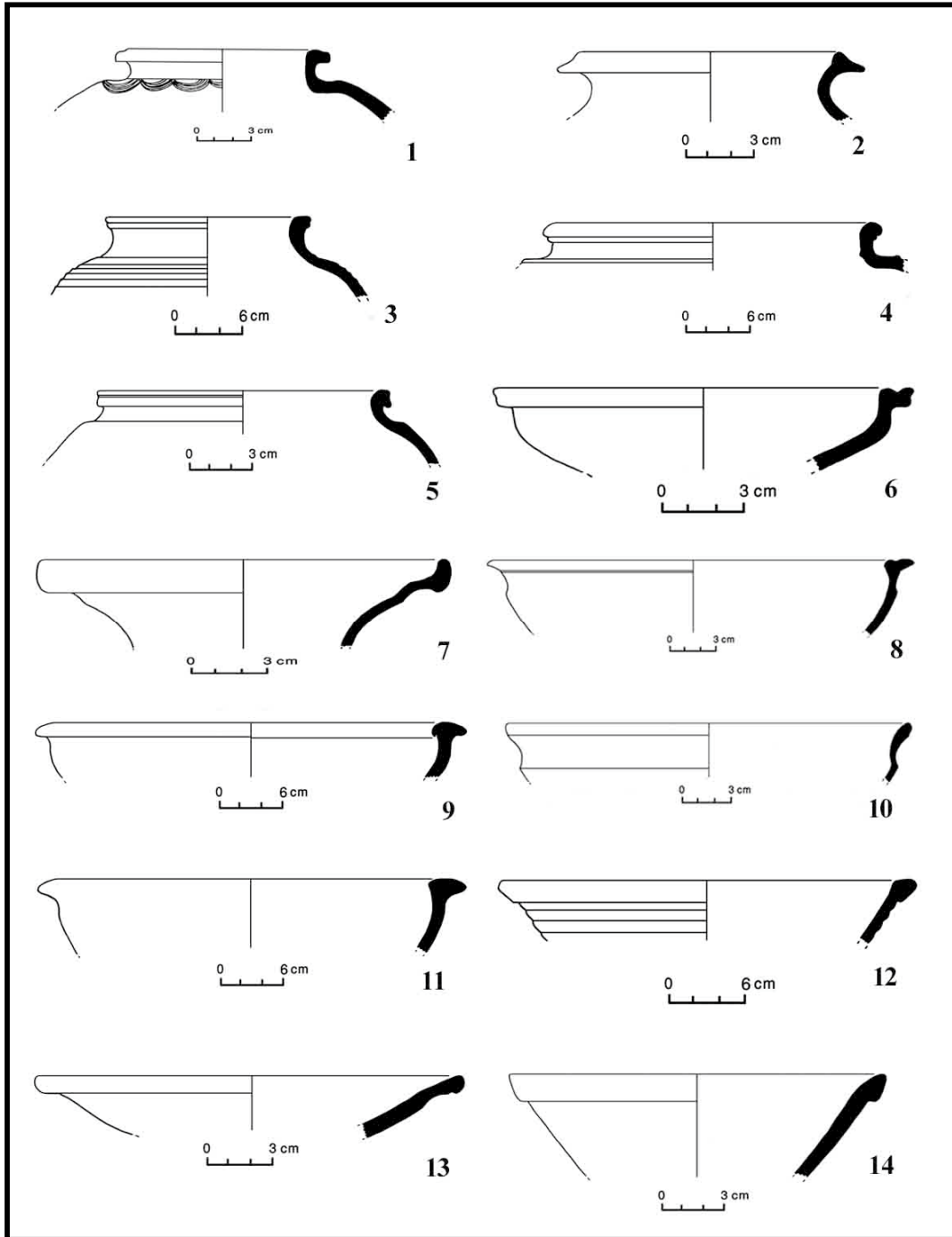


Plate 2

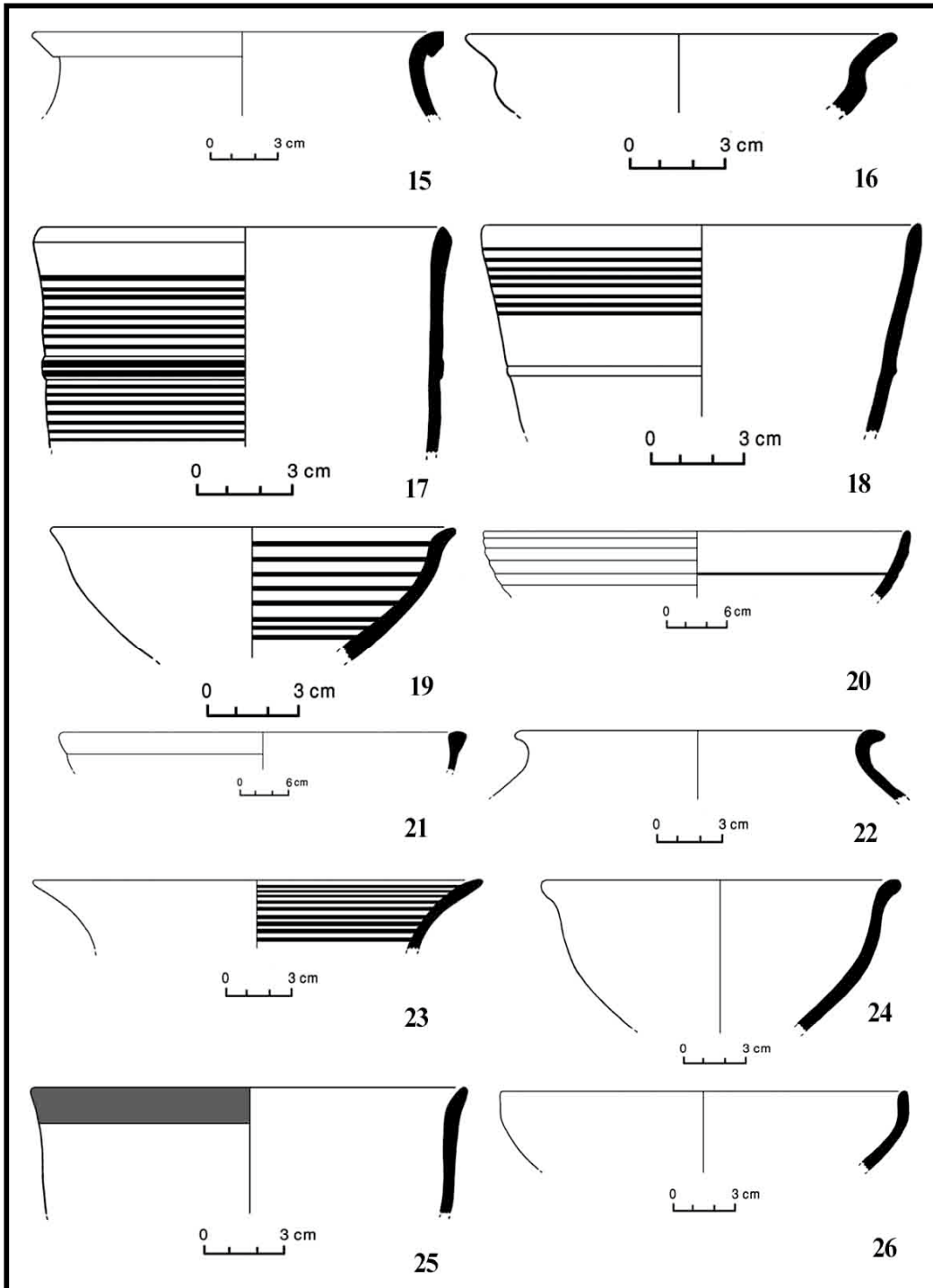
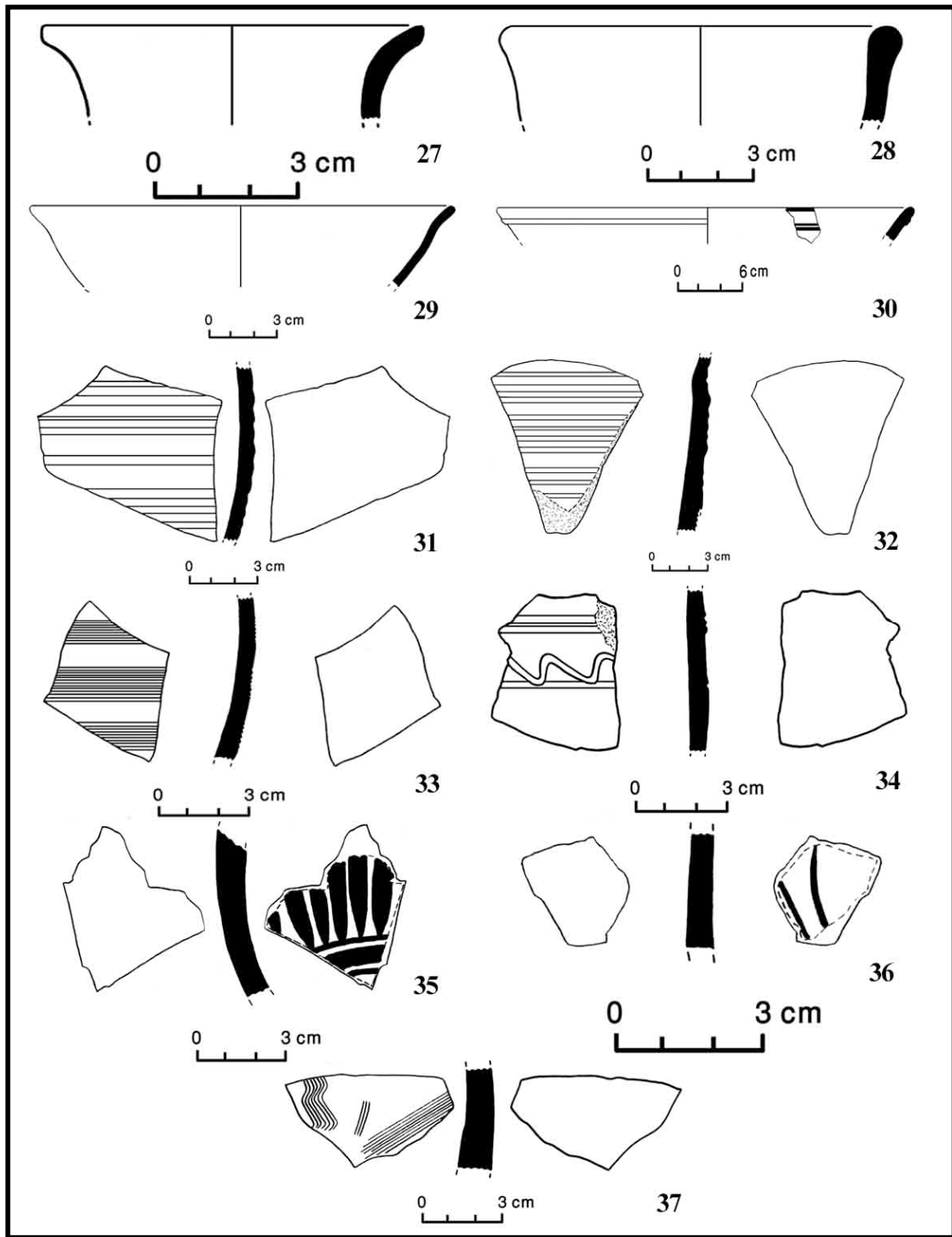


Plate 3



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**Fig1.** Kuh-e Khajeh in Sistan



**Fig 2.** Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh (Qaleh Kaferun)

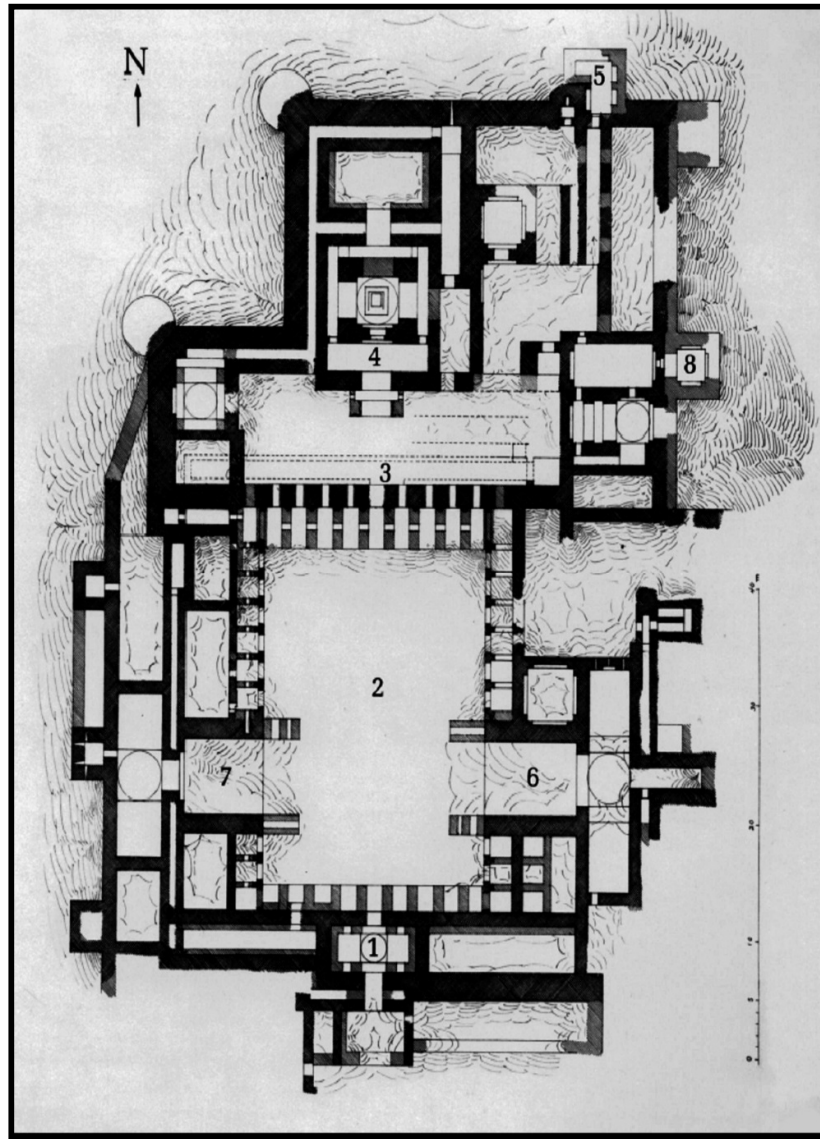
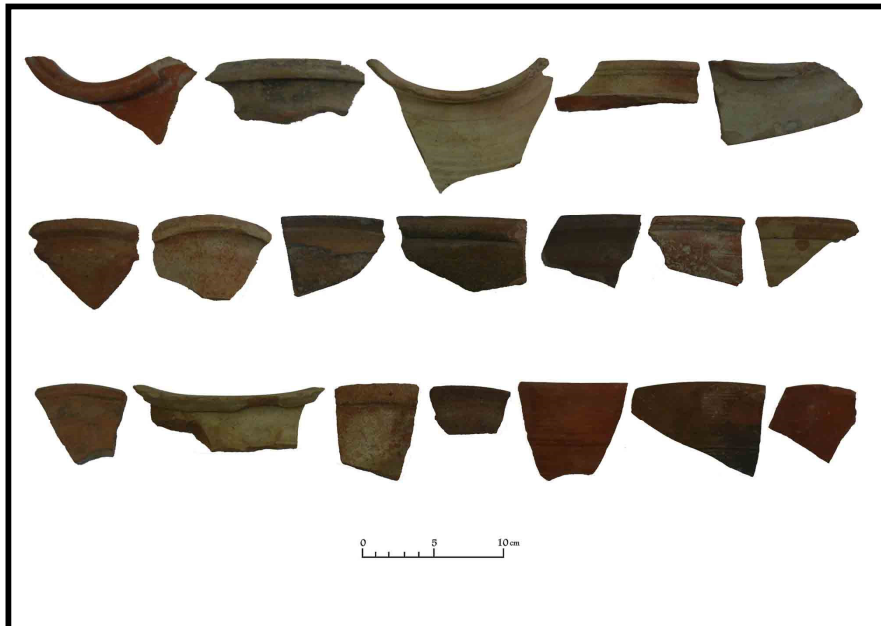


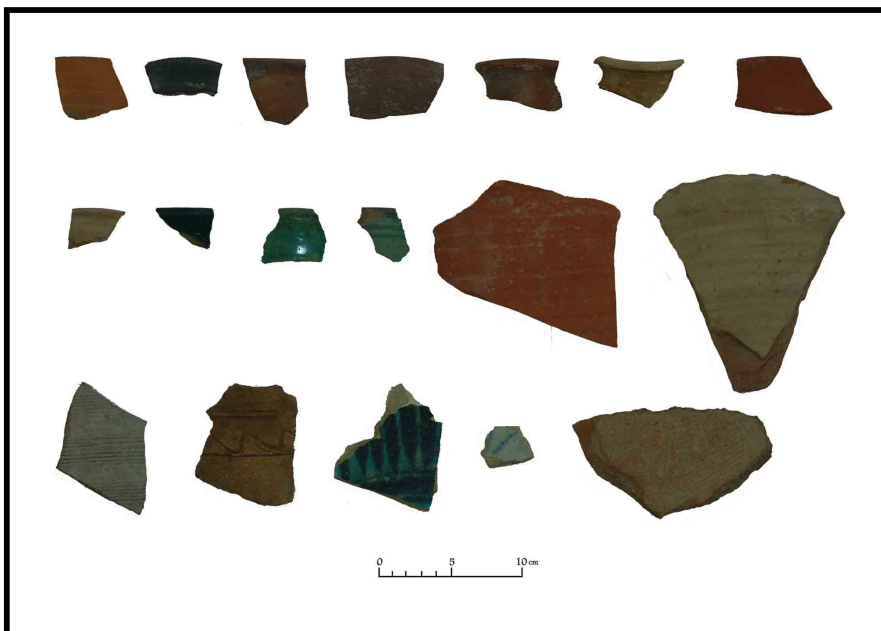
Fig 3. Herzfeld's plan of Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh (Herzfeld2002)

- |              |                 |                   |          |                          |              |              |         |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------|
| 1            | 2               | 3                 | 4        | 5                        | 6            | 7            | 8       |
| - South Gate | - Central Court | - Painted Gallery | - Temple | - North Gate and Tower A | - East Eivan | - West Eivan | - Tower |





**Fig 4.** Samples of Pottery the Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh



**Fig5.** Samples of Pottery the Palace of Kuh-e Khajeh

## بازنگری در گاهنگاری کاخ کوه خواجه (قلعه کافرون) با تکیه بر نمونه‌های سفالین سطحی

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تاریخ دریافت: ۹۲/۷/۵ تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۳/۶/۳۰

کوه خواجه در فاصله‌ی ۲۰ کیلومتری جنوب غرب شهر زابل یکی از مناطق مهم تاریخی سیستان به شمار می‌رود که موقعیت ژئوپلیتیکی و مذهبی آن از ایام باستان سبب شده که در سطح مسطح و دامنه‌ی پرشیب شرقی آن بناهای قابل توجهی احداث شود. علیرغم مطالعات و پژوهش‌های انجام گرفته از سوی پژوهشگران و باستان شناسان، تاکنون کرونولوژی مشخص و دقیقی درباره آن مطرح نشده و مطالعات اندک صورت گرفته نیز براساس معماری این مکان بوده است.

در نوشتار حاضر سعی بر آن است که براساس داده‌های سفالی نسبت به گاهنگاری نسبی کاخ کوه خواجه اقدام شود. از اینرو برای تامین این منظور مبادرت به جمع‌آوری داده‌های مورد نیاز به روش بررسی روشمند در سطح قلعه گردید. از آن جایی که در مطالعات باستان‌شناسی، شناخت ویژگی‌های سفال اهمیت فراوانی دارد، طبیعتاً به مطالعه‌ی متغیرهای سفال اهمیت بیشتری داده شد. چنان که برای انجام این مقصود سفال‌های شاخص و گردآوری شده از سطح محوطه مورد طبقه‌بندی، گونه‌شناسی و گونه‌شناختی قرار گفتند.

براساس نتایج بدست آمده از گونه‌شناختی سفال‌های سطحی، کاخ کوه خواجه (قلعه کافرون) دارای سه دوره‌ی استقرار متفاوت می‌باشد. دوره‌ی نخست مربوط به دوره اشکانیان، دوره دوم ساسانیان و دوره سوم به دوره‌ی اسلامی تعلق دارد که سده‌های ۶ تا ۸ هجری را در برمی‌گیرد

واژگان کلیدی: سیستان، کاخ کوه خواجه، قلعه کافرون، سفال سیستان، دوره اشکانی، دوره ساسانی

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