**Tang-i Bulaghi Reports 2: TB 64**

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**The Achaemenid building at site 64 in  
Tang-e Bulaghi**

# 1 Achaemenid Building

The Iranian-Polish rescue excavations on site 64 at Tang-e Bulaghi ([fig. 1](#)) were primarily focused on the study of remains dating to the Sasanian period. The potsherds scattered over the surface of the site suggested the presence of an Achaemenid occupation. This was confirmed by pottery found in the lowest levels of some test trenches, but it was only after cleaning the remains of a massive wall in the western part of the site ([fig. 2](#)) during the 2006 spring season that we decided to return in the autumn to Tang-e Bulaghi to excavate in that sector. The pottery sherds found in the



*Fig. 1: Tang-e Bulaghi. General view of site no. 64.*

deposits associated with the wall suggest that it dates to the Achaemenid period; in addition, the results of the geomagnetic survey clearly show a rectangular structure to which the wall belongs (fig. 3). The results of the 2006 spring season also confirmed that the wall was built upon a more modest construction datable to an earlier phase of the same period.

In order to trace the outer walls and the inner arrangement of the structure, eleven trenches of different size were opened. Due to the limited time available for the excavation, the trenches were laid out not according to a grid system but only in the areas in which our preliminary hypothesis could be tested, and the exploration stopped when the base of the outer wall or the associated structures were reached.



Fig. 2: Trench 11, view of eastern massive wall.

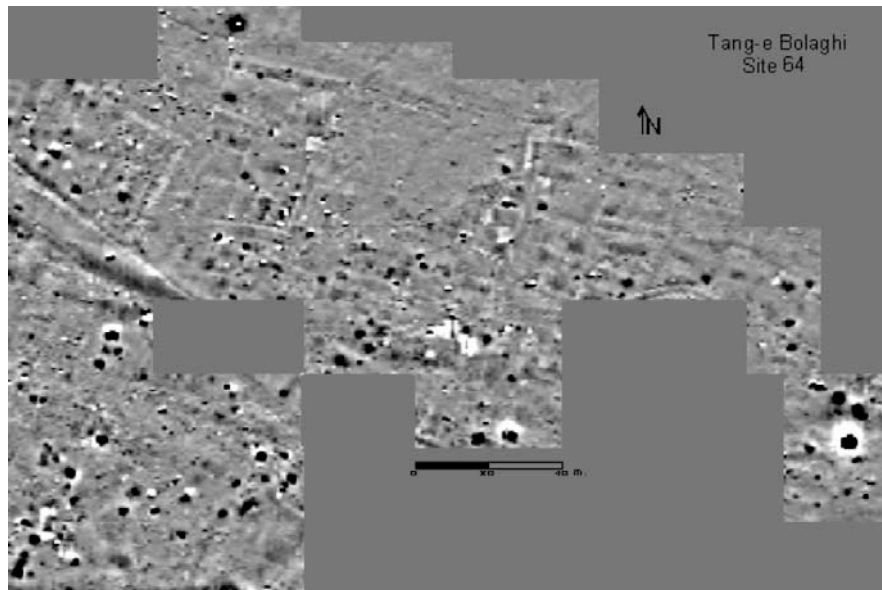


Fig. 3: Geomagnetic map of site no. 64 (by B. Aminpour).



There was only one test trench, opened in this sector during our first season, that was excavated to virgin soil, while in all trenches deposits of Sasanian date were recorded.

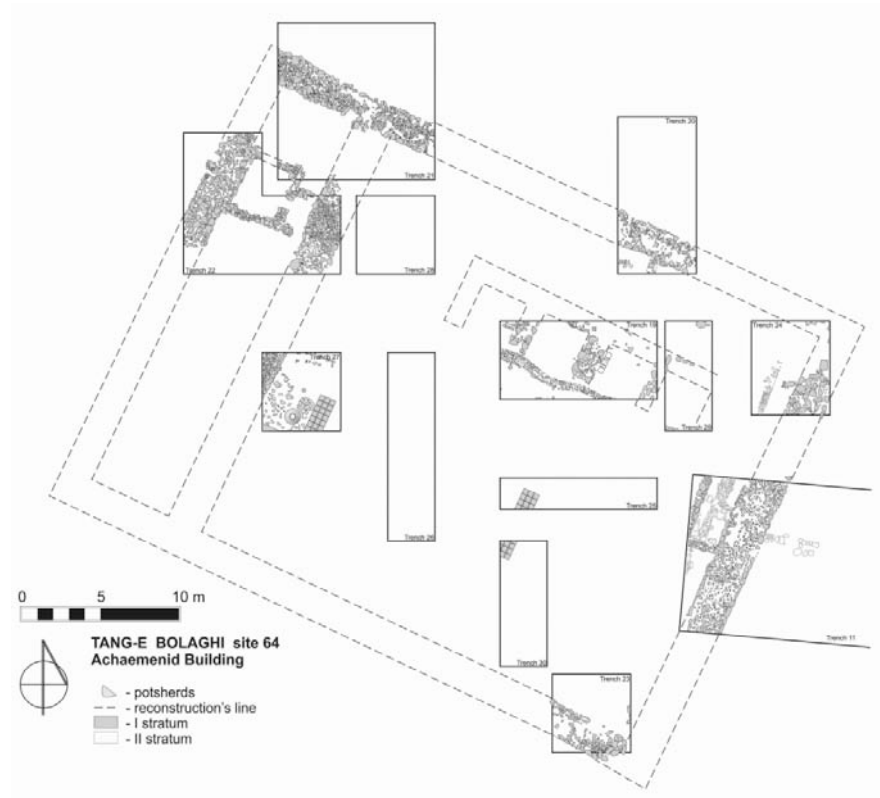


Fig. 4: Location of the trenches, plan and reconstruction of the structures.

After this short season we were able to reconstruct the line of a massive wall surrounding a rectangular area of about 40 m by 30 m (fig. 4). The wall, or rather the stone foundations of the wall measuring about 2 meters in thickness, was constructed of coarsely dressed large stones, carefully laid in two rows with boulders filling the core. Over the top, a layer of smaller stones and a layer of clay 5-8 cm thick were laid in order to produce a level surface on which the lowest course of

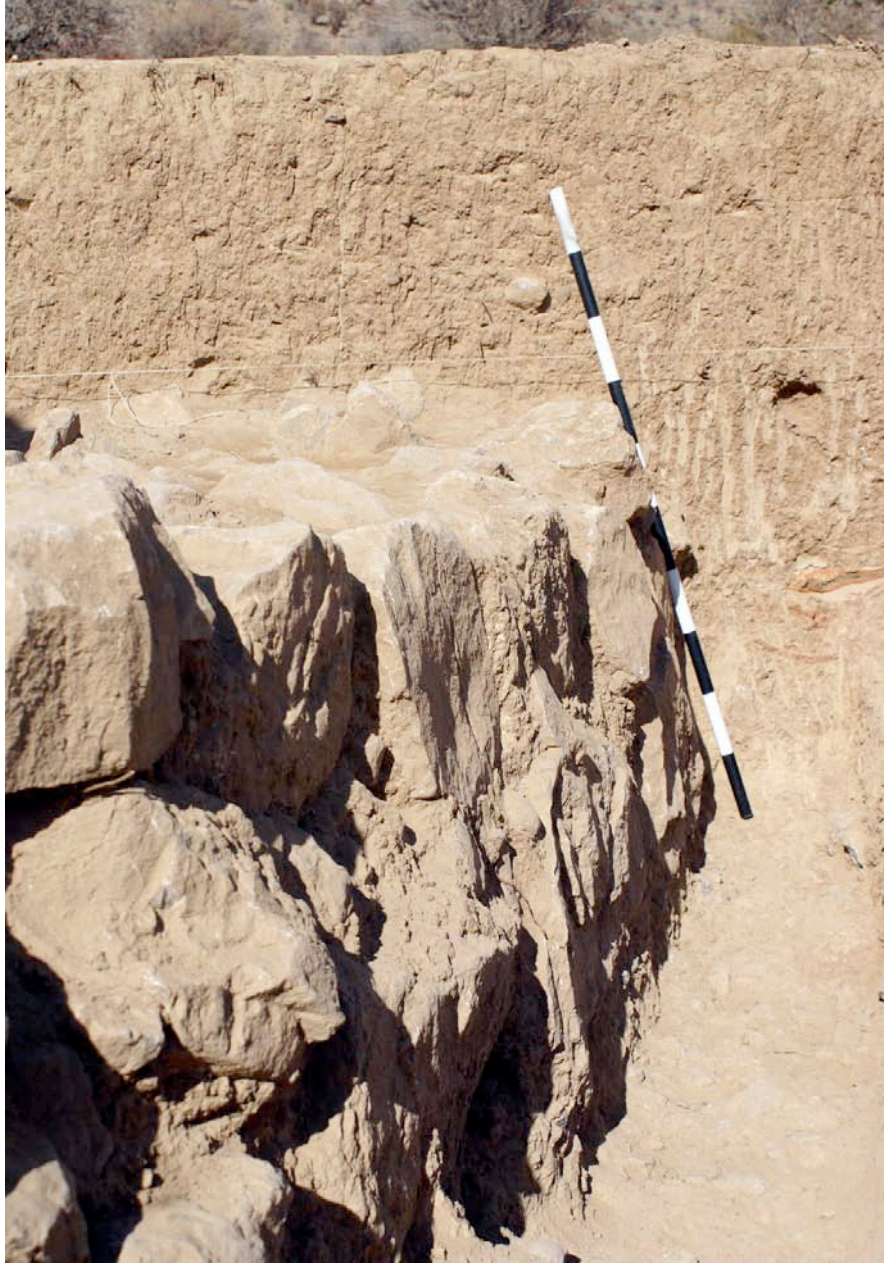


the mud brick wall was set (fig. 5). There was another solid wall 2.20 m wide running for a distance of 5 m to the east from the outer wall and parallel to it. As the structure was built on terrain gently sloping toward the south-southwest, the builders constructed the foundations at different heights: one course of stones in the higher areas and two courses in the lower ones (fig. 6). During the excavation we were able to observe that the difference in the level of the foundation base of that inner wall between its northern and southern segments is c. 50 cm.



*Fig. 5: Trench 22, view of upper part of the massive outer wall showing successive layers of building material.*

A small domestic building consisting of a vestibule and a main room was discovered in the trenches opened in the northern area between the walls. Its foundations were constructed by



*Fig. 6: Trench 27, two courses of stone foundations of the inner, massive wall.*



*Fig. 7: Trench 19, view of remains of the ayvan type rooms.*



*Fig.8: Trench 19, layer of small pebbles mixed with clay in front of the open sides of the rooms.*



simply placing stones of different sizes in rows on the same level as the two massive walls, which suggests that all the structures were constructed at about the same time. There was a hearth built against the outer massive wall, used as the back wall of the main room. The hearth consisted of layers of fired red clay, encircled by a rectangular clay edge. A gap in the edge may have facilitated the removal of ashes.

Positive anomalies detected during the geophysical survey carried out by Mr. Babak Aminpour suggested the presence of several rooms bordering at least the eastern enclosure wall, which was confirmed by our excavation.

Remains of some structures were also unearthed in the north-central part of the area surrounded by the walls. Although the foundations of the walls constructed of two rows of boulders and smaller stones filling the interstices were only partially preserved, it appears possible to reconstruct here a row of at least four square rooms ( $3.30 \times 3.30$  m) walled on three sides and open on the fourth (**fig. 7**). A compact layer (about 10 cm thick) of small pebbles mixed with clay in front of the open sides of the rooms (**fig. 8**) probably served as a pavement protecting the users from mud on rainy days, while warmth and/or meal preparation appears to have been ensured by hearths, traces of which were detected on the floor, and by a sub-rectangular hearth located on the low platform ( $0,55 \times 1.35$  m), built of mud bricks ( $33 \times 33 \times 10$  cm) against one of the walls.

The plan of these rooms resembles the *ayvān* plan, which is important from the point of view of ancient Iranian architecture.





The remnants of another structure were unearthed in the western part of the area, near the inner massive wall. This mud brick wall, about 1.05 m wide, composed of three rows of bricks ( $33 \times 33 \times 10$  cm) running parallel to the massive wall 3 m to the east, is now preserved to a maximum height of about 50 cm. There is not enough evidence for the reconstruction of a plan of the whole structure built here; however, a large amount of pottery sherds found between these two walls, among them the fragment of a large jar lying upside down (fig. 9), suggests that some pottery vessels fell or were thrown from above. In any case, the storage function of the structure is certain.



Fig. 9: Trench 27, storage jar sunken in floor and deposit of pottery fragments.

Interpretation of the entire structure is much more difficult, although there is a clear resemblance to Achaemenid imperial constructions. In any case, the considerable effort required to



construct such a building and the presence of special ceramics (figs. 10, 11-17) suggest a construction ordered by the royal administration. The nature and the function of the rooms revealed in the north-central part of the area surrounded by massive walls have a crucial role in interpretation of the structure. As the rooms are arranged in a row without internal communication and are open to one side, it may not be that they were used for permanent dwelling or storage. However, the hearths, the sub-rectangular hearth as well as the large amount of pottery fragments suggest that the rooms were at least temporarily inhabited. There is also no doubt that the massive walls played a defensive role. Bringing these data together, we propose, as a hypothesis, that the function of this structure was a way station, a place where messengers traveling on official business could obtain food, drink and fresh horses (Hdt. v.52-54; ix.98), a possibility well known from ancient texts but not from archaeological evidence. This hypothesis can be confirmed only by excavation, perhaps at one of the sites which were tentatively identified as way stations. One of these at Madakeh is described by W. Kleiss as a five-room stone building of about 40 × 30 m (1981, 49, Abb.5). The size and the general layout of both structures, that recorded by Kleiss and that revealed at site 64 at Tang-e Bulaghi, are clearly similar, which makes the identification of the Tang-e Bulaghi building as a way station more plausible.



Fig. 10: Trench 27. Decorated fragments of jar



## 2 Hunting Scene

During the third season of excavation on site n° 64, fragments of a ceramic vessel were discovered along a mud brick wall situated to the east of trench 27. The external surface of the body of the pot is decorated with applied motifs representing a hunting scene. The different fragments of this vessel were discovered separately. After restoration, the main shape of the vessel could be determined (fig. 11).

**The vessel -** The vessel is made of a well-fired ware with a sandy-clay temper. The external surface is polished and covered with a thin orange-coloured slip. The internal surface, of the same colour, is unpolished and without a slip. The form of the vessel is distinctive. Only the middle part of the body (max. diameter 24 cm) and the base remain, the top having disappeared. The body is decorated with 22 vertical grooves 1 cm deep, with a maximum width of 3 mm. Also visible on the body are the spots on either side where the two handles were broken off. Two fragmentary tubular spouts were attached to the base obliquely. The clay joins used to attach the spouts to the base of the vessel are visible, which indicates that the potter's hand could not reach into the bottom of the vessel, which must have had a narrow opening. The two curved handles must have been attached to the neck near the opening, unless there was only one handle, as for a basket. The total height of the vessel is estimated at 30-40 cm.



*Fig. 11: Trench 27, fragments of a jar decorated in relief,  
royal hunting scene right of the handle.*

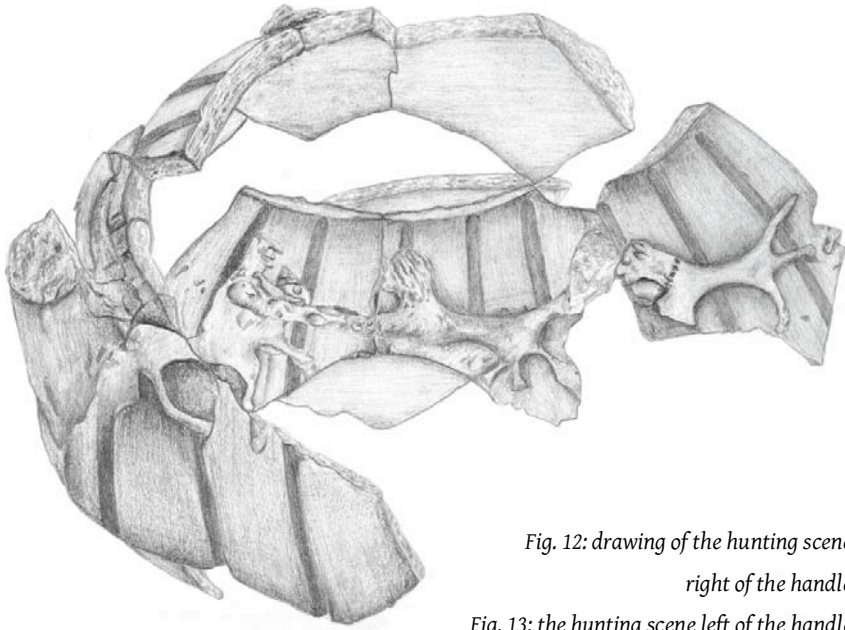


Fig. 12: drawing of the hunting scene  
right of the handle  
Fig. 13: the hunting scene left of the handle





This reconstruction enables a comparison of this vessel to two recipients with high handles of the Achaemenid period carried by the Armenians in the bas-reliefs of the Apadana stairway at Persepolis. Alternatively, it may be a vessel with a single handle such as those carried by the Medes.

Because of the presence of tubular spouts protruding from the base, the vessel was probably placed on a separate stand. Twin-spouted amphoras are well known in the Iranian world including the post-Achaemenid period (Haerinck 1980).

Twin-spouted amphoras were sometimes called “pact vessels”, because they suggest the action of several individuals drinking from the same vessel, a sign of fidelity to an alliance or the confirmation of an agreement.<sup>1</sup>

**Applied decoration** - The applied motifs on the body of the vessel are even more remarkable than its shape, which is unknown in the Achaemenid pottery tradition. A horizontal register, 7 cm high at maximum, runs between the handles (figs. 12-13). The depth of the relief varies between 1.5 and 11 mm. Two parts of the decoration can be distinguished: to the right and to the left of the surviving handle.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kambakhshfard 1379 (2001), 386, speaking of pact vases: “the pots with one or two handles having two holes at the bottom are pact pots or cups. This is to say that when there occurred agreements concerning marriage or brotherhood, or peace treaties, the individuals engaged in these agreements successively drank the liquid contained in the vessel. Probably a few drops of blood were added. Examples of these ceramic cups have been discovered by Russian archaeologists in the region of the *Sakas* (Scythians)”.

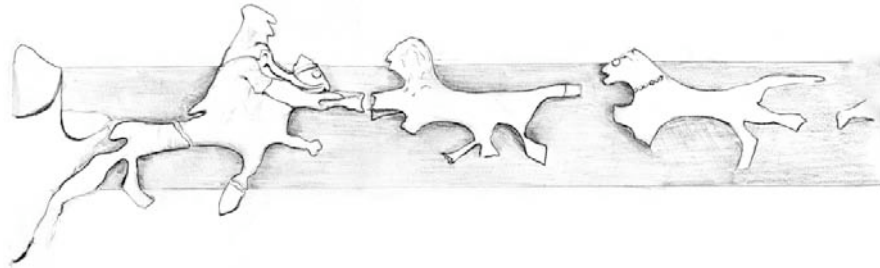


Fig. 14: drawing of the hunting scene right of the handle.

To the right of the handle (**fig. 14**), a rider sits on a galloping horse. The animal's body is represented without details. Its head is relatively small and the eye is marked in relief. The horse's bridle, small bands in relief, is clearly visible. The rider is leaning forward, his left hand holding the bridle and his right hand apparently an arrow or another pointed weapon towards an attacking animal. He wears a felt cap (*bashlyk*) characteristic of Achaemenid art. The cap, placed on the forehead of the rider, shades his large nose; falling to the shoulders, it covers his ears and chin. There are numerous examples of this cap in hunting scenes on seal impressions of the Achaemenid period (cf. Boardman 1970, 336-42).

In front of the rider, an animal (probably a lion) is moving towards him. The fine lines on the head and neck suggest the thick mane of the animal (**fig. 17**). Behind the lion, another animal, without a mane, has a line of engraved dots on its neck; it is probably a dog (**fig. 16**). The hunting dog motif is well known on seals of Graeco-Persian style of the Achaemenid period. (cf. Boardman, 1970, p. 337). It could be that during the confrontation between rider and lion, the lion was also attacked from behind by a dog.





Fig. 15: drawing of the hunting scene left of the handle.

On the left side of the handle, four elements are represented (fig. 15). First, there is an animal that may be a lion. Right of this animal, a rider is moving in the opposite direction (towards the right). Here the horse is more carefully represented, with elongated body, raised tail and open mouth, indicative of movement. The rider is only outlined and not completely seated on the horse's back, as he is about to throw his weapon. 2 cm from the chest of the rider, there is a fine line 3 cm long, the end of which touches the head of the animal in front. The line probably represents the arrow that the rider held in his right hand. The long, pointed cap that covers the rider's head is that of the Scythians (Sakā). In the inscriptions of Darius, these people are mentioned as the Scythians "with the pointed hat" (cf. Schmitt, 2000, 49).

It is to be noted that the motif of a rider-hunter in a pointed cap associated with a Persian in a hunting ritual has been unknown until now. In front of the rider is an animal which is difficult to identify. Its upright tail raises the possibility that it is an ibex or stag.

An unidentified animal is the last motif in the decoration on the left side. Because of its location just before the handle, only the head and forequarters are represented.



*Figs. 16-17:  
dog and lion  
in the scene  
right of the handle*



**Conclusion** - The vessel from site 64 at Tang-i Bulaghi presents unique characteristics. It may be supposed that vessels of this type were fabricated in very small quantities, probably by order, and according to the taste and talent of the potter. The hypothesis of the ritual function of this vessel may explain the theme of the decoration. In this decoration there are two riders with two different caps, well known in Achaemenid representations. Although the representation of a Persian rider wearing a felt cap (*bashlyk*) in hunting scenes is frequent, the representation of a hunter in a pointed cap is a new element. The presence of these two riders in the same hunting scene – if this interpretation is correct – opens important perspectives concerning the different peoples of the Achaemenid empire, what sort of relations they had and how they coexisted. From an artistic point of view, despite their relatively coarse quality, these applied motifs demonstrate more liberty and dynamism than official Achaemenid art.

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