

BRUNO GENITO (UNO)  
*BRINGING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT.<sup>1</sup> LOOKING FORWARD TO THE  
FUTURE OF THE SCIENTIFIC HERITAGE OF THE ITALIAN PROJECTS IN SISTAN<sup>2</sup>  
AND MASJED-E JOM 'E OF ISFAHAN<sup>3</sup> (IRAN) (FIGS. 1-4)*

## Introduction

In this paper I will try to briefly give, an idea of two projects under examination, in Sistan (Fig. 5) and in the Great (Congregational) Mosque of Isfahan (Friday Mosque) (*masjed-e jom 'e*) (Fig. 6). It is noteworthy to understand how they were originated, and how one thinks right now of being able to continue them using new available approaches of the computer science.

The continuation of those projects constitute the aim of a complex work at fully digitizing their graphic, photographic data, related to the large amount of materials and objects found during the excavations conducted.

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<sup>1</sup> The generational change, which every country needs, is never only a *birth and death* fact, it does not mean to simply put a young instead of an elder; it means, nevertheless, doing new things, or do very differently things of yesterday.

<sup>2</sup> The Iranian region of Sistan, situated along the border between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, constitutes today, together with the southern region of Baluchistan, one of the widest provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: *Sistān va Balūchestān*. From a morphological point of view, it represents the westernmost sector, encompassed within the boundaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran, of the lacustrine system (today partially interested by artificial flooding) forming the Hamun Lake, whose eastern portion is instead encompassed within the Afghan province of Nimruz. That lacustrine basin, however, is only the terminal part of a wider and more complex inland hydrographic system, located between eastern Iran and south-western Afghanistan, having an extension wider than 400 × 200km (Jux and Kempf 1983, 7) and named Sistan Basin (or Hilmand Basin, after its main tributary river). The fragile ecological balance of the entire Basin is totally dependent from the hydrology of the Hilmand river itself (for this reason considered as Sistan's "life-line": Fairservis 1961, 13).

<sup>3</sup> The research activities in the Friday Mosque in Isfahan were directed by Prof. Umberto Scerrato from 1972 to 1978, in agreement with the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation for the Protection of Monuments of Iran (1972-1977), the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation (ICHO) (1978-2000), (now Iranian Cultural, Tourism and Handicraft, Heritage Organisation) (ICTHHO), the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO), the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO) and now again ISMEO/Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente, the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"(UNO) (Galdieri 1972; 1973; 1972-73; 1984; 2002; 2011; Scerrato 1973; 1974b; 1975; 1976; 1977; 1978; 2001) and the Ministero Italiano degli Affari Esteri; the work was restarted since 1999 and in 2003 in particular with the *ADAMJI* project (Genito, Saiedi 2010).

Many of the more detailed aspects of this approach will be further addressed to by Enzo Cocca and Andrea Genito (*infra* 45-60) and Giulio Maresca (*infra* 61-62). Those projects were, as is well known, born more than fifty years ago on the basis of completely different ideas from those with which one could today imagine similar projects of excavation, restoration and management of cultural heritage, or like today would develop the same.

In particular, of course, one is dealing with the activities in Sistan (eastern Iran) and of some sites, including the most important and studied of them, Dahāne-ye Gholāmān<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 7).

The Italian archaeological activities carried out in Iran in Sistan during the 60s and 70s of last century were planned and organised in collaboration with the *Service for the Restoration and Preservation of the Historical Monuments of Iran* (now *Iranian Cultural Handicraft and Tourism Heritage Organisation*) (ICHTHO) and the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO) (then IsIAO, and now again ISMEO). The activities headed by Giuseppe Tucci and Umberto Scerrato (1959-1978), amongst other discoveries and investigations, brought to the light a complex of monumental buildings at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, Qal'a-ye Sam and Qal'ye Tepe in 1962-1963 (Fig. 5), the first representing the main urban centre of ancient Zranka (Drangiana), one of the eastern provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. After more than fifty years since the end of the field activities, the assumptions made at the time of the excavations still have their merits and remain very fertile, because based on the strong intuitive capability of the archaeologists. The issues raised at that time are still standing and little can be added at least in the near future, unless a new season full of extensive surveys and excavations topographic is again conducted in the area.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The site takes its name from a cut in the terraced desert in Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (*Gateway of the Slaves*) (Genito 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). This term and its meaning are totally like redundant, and obviously, suggestively evoke very ancient times that often archaeological remains recall. It is, however, as is known, a name chosen by the popular tradition in attributing an historical meaning to a geological pass (substantially of a natural origin but probably somehow artificially modified during history to meet some specific needs of the local population) on a *dāsh*t overlooking the archaeological remains, suggesting a real opening (gate) surrounding the alluvial plane in which the village of Qal'a-ye Now lies and putting this plane into connection with the Chah Nime depressions (today artificially filled by water and known as Chah Nime reservoirs). The toponym was variously spelled in the preliminary reports of the ISMEO archaeological mission and in the following publications by the excavator and other Italian scholars, until its correct form was stated (Hinz 1971; Schippmann 1971, 50, note 102).

<sup>5</sup> The activities of recovery, recognition, retrieval, organization and, finally, digital archive concerned about a thousand of photographic films of different frame (18 × 36mm; 6 × 6mm; 6 × 8mm), thousands of excavation photographs, more than two thousand photographs of finds, hundreds of excavation slides,

The present ARCHAEO.Pro.Di.Mu.S., as it is clear in the light of the discussed reasons, is supposed to be another important step of a more articulated path started some years ago, which finally will lead to a final and comprehensive publication of those archaeological activities carried out by the IsMEO.

The other important activity is related to the excavation and restoration of a unique monument of its kind, the masjed-e jom'eh of Isfahan of Abbasid foundation (8th century) and with a Seljuk definite set up (12th century), with a wide range of subsequent interventions up to the Qajar era; the monument until the time of excavation, was known only by sources (Fontana 2011).

For seven years in the 70s of the last century (1972 to 1978) a joint Italian-Iranian team had developed excavations, and for eight years (2003 to 2010), a consequent digitation activity of the data collected was realized. Originally the project was, to tell the truth, above all, a restoration project of an important monument, directed by the late architect Eugenio Galdieri, and on which a few years later, the excavation activities were grafted. Both these projects were, as is known, promoted by IsMEO and led by Umberto Scerrato.<sup>6</sup>

### *Sistan*

One will chronologically begin with Dahāne-ye Gholāmān emphasizing its particular role of the only known extended “settlement” of ancient Iran. The geomorphological setting of the Iranian plateau is, as is known, in some ways, less suitable from a general point of view, to develop large urban cultures; rather different, a part from the Mediterranean, from Mesopotamia and China areas where the great plains of Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, Indus, and of Yellow and the Yangtze River. Iran is not made up of large floodplains, but of a plateau in which small and medium size rivers flow, predominantly torrential and often seasonal in character. The plateau does not present for the historical period, large cities, but basically great monuments, large and numerous iconographic remains, even larger architectural traces, and few settlements in the meaning one may give to sites with a “urban”

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hundreds of excavation plans, dozens of drawings of finds, inventories and lists of the most significant objects found, as well as excerpts from the excavations diaries and hundreds of pages of handwritten notes.

<sup>6</sup> The project has analysed and put on a digital archive the data of more than 500.000 pottery fragments, among which c. 100.000 diagnostic, 7500 glass fragments, 700 stucco fragments (painted and un painted), 40 coins and other different metal fragments, and thousands and thousands of glazed tiles for architectonic decoration.

characterization. The forms of the peopling and of territorial occupation over the plateau, present a quite different character from those of the traditions of the great sedentary civilizations, widespread over the whole ancient Near East. The Iranian plateau has certainly allowed one to establish villages, which in Neolithic, Bronze and Iron ages are, in fact, very numerous. In the historical period, nevertheless they are very few and one of these is certainly Dahāne-ye Gholāmān. The reason for all this looks like very simple. Sistan region is not a plateau, and, mostly on the easternmost side where our sites are located, it consists of an alluvial plain, created thanks to the flow of the big inland river, the Hilmand coming from the Afghan mountainous range.<sup>7</sup>

The poor “urban” traces of the ancient imperial period in Iran have brought, in this tradition of studies, many interpretative difficulties amongst scholars. To analyze an empire, among the greatest one of the antiquity, without practically “urban traces” is not an easy task; even today it is increasingly difficult to propose, notwithstanding the case of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, an archaeological definition of the Achaemenid empire.<sup>8</sup> When, however, the remains of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān were found between 1958 and 1959, the discovery was greeted with much enthusiasm and attention, and, at the same time, with great surprise

<sup>7</sup> The particular catchment area of Sistan is composed by three sub-geographical units: the upper delta plain inside the Hilmand river, which is mostly drained and used for agriculture, the marshes (Hamoons) covering the lower delta plain and a hypersaline lake (Gowd-e Zereh) in the southern part of the basin, which collects the encroachment of wetlands and - in case of severe flooding - the river. There is no run-off from this terminal lake: the water of Gowd-e Zereh is lost completely due to the particular conditions of strong evaporation. The river is the largest drainage system of Sistan, but also other smaller rivers feed the marshes, which are, from the environmental point of view, the most important parts of Sistan. The basin is one of the driest regions in the world and has played and plays a very important role in the area, especially since it does drain the waters of the melting snow from the mountains of the south of the Hindu Kush. Three tributaries contribute to the balance: the Kash, Farah and Ardaskan (Harut), which collect the waters of the western part of the Hindu Kush. The River (*Erymandrus*, Natural History, 1962, VI, 25, 23), is located south-west of Afghanistan and eastern Iran and is about 1150 km long. Its width varies between 200 and 900 m., and the depth of 2 to 5m. Originating from the chain of Bābā Range to the East in central Afghanistan, the river flows South-West through more than half of the length in Afghanistan, before flowing North for a short distance into the Iranian territory in the swamps on the border between Afghanistan and Iran. It occupies an area of 160,000 square km. The satellite data (Landsat 7 ETM), the geomorphological indications, geological surveys and field observations indicate that the river is often varied on the basis of tectonic factors. Historical and archaeological sites in the area, confirm that the river has fluctuated in the North, so that the delta is now active in the northern part of the basin. The deviations of the river Hilmand over the past thousands of years can be considered as a neotectonic phenomenon due to the lifting of the southern regions and/or failure of the northern parts of the territory. Seven different delta, whose formations belong to different periods are recognizable.

<sup>8</sup> How to archaeologically define an Empire is a particular historical and political-anthropological issue which in the last decades has found a specific role in the historical and archaeological scientific debate. As far as the Achaemenid Empire is concerned, the situation is particularly difficult because of the lack of clear “urban” character of its remains.

as well. Until then, and the picture in recent decades has not changed a lot, one did not know any city, a set, that is, urban, with public and private buildings and, in some way, even roads or, better said, trajectories of paths between buildings, for the period between the late 7th and early 6th, which usually is defined as Achaemenid. The main Umberto Scerrato's issue was to propose a reliable chronology for those archaeological remains (Figs. 8, 9); at that time dating tools for an absolute chronology were not very much in use in Italy, even if not a few soil samples were collected in the field, and unfortunately nevertheless, analyzed. Above all, however, on the site both epigraphic and artistic traces were not found as well, and as is known the tradition of archaeological studies considers them as crucial materials, which by themselves are characterized as historical. Neither coins, nor seals, except some without inscriptions,<sup>9</sup> were found, and attempts at any chronological and cultural interpretation, then, appeared very complex. Umberto Scerrato had then, and later also always maintained that the date of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān was related to the Achaemenid period, and this both on the basis of comparative and chronological analyses of the pottery fragments, and on that of the architectural plans of the buildings, the presence of one seal and seal impressions of neo-Babylonian age (Fig. 10),<sup>10</sup> and of a three-aisled bronze arrowhead (Genito 2013) of the Scythian tradition (Fig. 11).<sup>11</sup> In those areas, as is well known, the building material is the mud clay; and stones are not used there; baked bricks will be used only in later periods.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, however, it is clear that since then, the documentation methods and the interpretative criteria, have changed a lot. Today one may speak about stratigraphic Units (Harris 1975; 1977; 1979a; 1979b; 1989), digital archaeology, territorial GIS, WebGIS – and Umberto may be could have imagined all this, even if I cannot tell, frankly,

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<sup>9</sup> The seal has never been published and very clearly recalls a neo-Babylonian style of the 6th century BC with animal decorative patterns.

<sup>10</sup> See the previous note.

<sup>11</sup> The issue of the spread of the three-aisled arrow heads and their chronological and cultural attribution is a long debated question. It goes back to the old soviet school and the related first western interpretation (Cleuziou 1976). The centrality of these items in the attempts of chronological attribution does not seem more convincingly accepted by scholars, who emphasize also their role of simple objects independently from the original warfare character.

<sup>12</sup> The psychological impact in front of the methods and techniques of excavation of mud structures has personally been really devastating; basically for whom as I was, accustomed to the more easy stone and brick architectural lines of an archaeology of other areas. Mud clay, as is known, is an elusive material constituted by the same type of soil of the filling and its interpretation as well as the recognition of its lines, results and is always very difficult. With the help of Umberto Scerrato, and the workers accustomed to that kind of building material, I was, however, able to become familiar with it, and making me courage, managed to go ahead.

whether he would have been delighted to these 360 degrees turns, with the respect to the reassuring technical archaeological routine of his times. I think he could have said *if you really want to do, do it*, he would have turned up his nose, knowing him, in a constructive sense, nevertheless, i.e., educational, and I do not think he was going against.

The numerous historical and archaeological issues that Dahāne-ye Gholāmān poses at the time of its discovery, and which arise even today for anybody who deals with its various aspects, are really crucial for the Achaemenid era. They are related to the nature of the state, or empire, which, in the sources seems the biggest and most extensive of the antiquity, both geographically, and for its political complexity. Of course the term “empire” that we normally use today, is borrowed from the tradition of the Roman studies. But it would have been more accurate to speak about a state, a supra-national state; someone has also named it “multi-ethnic” in character, even if this is, perhaps, not exactly the best definition, although different ethnic groups were actually widespread over the extended area from Egypt to Central Asia in those times. Others have also defined the Achaemenian Empire as a multi-linguistic state, because the official epigraphic documents are, as is well known, written in three different languages: Old Persian, Akkadian and Elamite.

Dahāne-ye Gholāmān is on the focus of this, I would say, political and anthropological issue, as it is located in a suburb area very far from the main centers like Persepolis and Pasargadae, and as such, it seems to reflect the contradictions of a controversial and, for many aspects, unknown relationships between the centers and the peripheries of the empire.

Even how to define the macroscopic archaeological traces of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, extended for about 100 ha., remains an open question; it is difficult to say, that is, if they can refer to a settlement *tout cour*, or to a city, and what kind of city (central or peripheral capital, suburbs etc.), and especially to which city, known by the sources, attribute them. One hundred hectares or less can only belong to a big urban center of a very particular settling meaning (Fig. 12).

Scerrato exposed himself, both for the identification of the city (Zranka/Zarin)<sup>13</sup> and for its chronology; absolutely incontrovertible data on

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<sup>13</sup> Its location and extent led scholars to identify it with Zarin of later classical sources as the capital of the satrapy of Drangiana of the empire (Gnoli 1993) and this interpretation for the moment has not been yet disproved. From the historical point of view, scholars generally agree that the first epigraphic mention of the Iranian territory around the Lake Hamun and the Helmand river can be found in the

both the issues there were not existing at that time. Still now one is not able to have from this point of view exhaustive answers; even if today, one has more possibilities to extensively use sophisticated methodological approaches and interpretations, both in terms of social and political complexity, and in those of diverse territorial meanings of a settlement, which, at that time, were certainly not manageable as today.

From the historical-architectonic point of view the remains of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (Fig. 13) refer, as already Scerrato proposed, to those of Persepolis (Fig. 14),<sup>14</sup> to its architectural floor plans mainly; in Sistan they were made in mud clay, profoundly different from the stone in use in Fars.<sup>15</sup> Such bold

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Bisotun inscription by Darius I (522-486 a.C.): DB col. I 1.16 (Kent 1953, 116-135; Schmitt 1991; Lecoq 1997, 83-96 and 187-217). In the Old Persian version of this inscription, the name of the country and its inhabitants is attested in the form “z-r-k” (to be read as *Zranka*), apparently its original name (Schmitt 1996, 535). In place of this original form, characterised by the initial sound “z”, in the majority of Greek and Latin sources (particularly the ones depending upon Alexander’s biographers; *idem* 1996, 535) several variants are attested, probably originating from a hypercorrect form \**Dranka* (Belardi 1960, 183), characterised, instead, by the initial sound “d”: *Drāngai*, *Drangé*, *Drangēné*, *Drangi(a)nē* - in Ctesias [König 1972], Polybius [Paton 1922-27], Strabo [1969], Diodorus [1985], Ptolemy [1971], Arrian [Sisti 2001], Stephan from Byzantium [Dindorf 1925]) or *Drangae*, *Drangiana*, *Drangiani* (Curtius Rufus [Atkinson, Gargiulo 2000], Pliny [Natural History 1962], Ammianus Marcellinus [Camus 1967], Justin [Peterson 1926]). Of particular importance is also the mention of the capital of Achaemenid Drangiana, Zarin (*Záriv*), in a passage from Ctesias’ *Persiká* (Gnoli 1967, 45 and n. 1), in the frame of some events occurred during the reign of Darius II (424-405 a.C.). Beside the Zarin mentioned by Ctesias, however, some cities bearing the same name and reported as the capital city of Drangiana are mentioned also in the *Stathmoi Parthikoi* by Isidorus of Charax [Schoff 1914] and in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* [Levi and Levi 1967], nevertheless referring to contexts differing both chronologically and topographically from the previous Ctesias’ attestation. As a consequence, one can argue that during the Achaemenid period, the administrative centre of the region, even maintaining the same name, probably shifted topographically several times, possibly to face gradual and progressive changes in the ecological and environmental balance of the region. On the basis of the information from the historical sources, from the very first IsMEO excavation campaigns at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, the hypothesis of a possible identification of the settlement whose buildings were progressively unearthed with the Zarin capital of Drangiana mentioned by Ctesias was put forward (Scerrato 1966b, 11; Gnoli 1967, 103-107).

<sup>14</sup> This is the Greek name of one of the main architectural complexes of the Achaemenid dynasty (the old Persian name was Pārsa, and the current toponym is Takht-e Jamshid, who draws on the tradition of the legendary mythical king Jamshid of the Shāh Nāmeḥ), on the road between Isfahan and Shiraz (Iran), north of the latter on the left of the river Pulvar. It was the main administrative center of Fars, cradle of the Persian civilization, and especially the most emblematic place of the power of the “King of Kings”, for the most representative ceremonies and custody of the treasures of greater importance for the dynasty. Founded by Darius I (518 BC), it was enlarged by his successors, until Artaxerxes III (mid-fourth century BC.); set on fire by the Macedonians, however, continued to be inhabited and was still relevant under the Sassanian time. The remains of the magnificent royal palaces, treasury, administrative structures, service and residential arise on a wide rectangular terrace. The buildings, in part based on solid rock, had brick walls, door frames and doors in cut-stone and were decorated by beautiful artistic reliefs. It also kept three royal tombs of the last Achaemenid, carved into the rock.

<sup>15</sup> The Italian-Iranian joint mission of the Università di Bologna directed by Pierfrancesco Callieri and Askari Chaverdi, A.R., by years is working at the foot of the Persepolis terrace in order to find some

proposals of comparing, and everything that it has entailed, including the comparisons with the great palaces of Darius, Xerxes etc. They in the lack, however, of any artistic and epigraphic documentation,<sup>16</sup> have hinted elements of certainty of chronological interpretation. These last ones still crop up here and there in different proposals, more recently advanced (Mohammadkhani 2012), but which can still be put to the test to a more careful reading of the aspects that had emerged from the context of excavation.

It would be enough, however, to consider and emphasize the existence of a monumental architecture, with monuments such as building no 3 of 50m × 50 circa, or building no 1, not excavated, but still larger than the first, and still others as nos 2, 15 and 16, that are not a small thing in the regional sistanic context. A great architecture made of huge monuments, whose buildings are clearly planned, may not appear so originated out of nowhere, but it must be the result of programmed also “political” activities, which can be attributed both to a dynastic power, or another independent from that. That there was or not an Achaemenid direct control in the area, such as the greatness of the satrapy widely suggests, is still an open question.

Dahāne-ye Gholāmān stands (Scerrato 1966a, 1966b) so very different from the ruins of Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa, where a monumental typology based on a plan module obsessively repeated is predominant; there it consists of central hypostyle halls inserted in pillared porches (Pasargadae), or in porches and rooms (Persepolis), whereas the very high stone columns are one of the main characteristic elements. The macroscopic mud remains of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, not involving both the columnar party and that of the hypostyle hall, are characterized, however, by the general use of the right angle, square halls surrounded by side pillared porches (public buildings) and central pillared rooms (in one case also circular) (private buildings), surrounded by oblong rooms and presence of ideological-ritual characterizations with the fire as central element (building no 3). As one may easily observe these plans belong to an urban space,

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settling signs contemporary to the buildings of the terrace, also suggested by classical sources as Diodorus Siculus (1985, Vol. III, Libri XIV, XVII). Something very interesting and chronologically located to the Achaemenid period has been specially found in the area of Tall-i Ajori; one should consider that the Pulvar plain is full of settlements from the proto-historical to the historical times. The remains up to now identified seem, for the time being, very significant and not as such as to suggest the existence of a city (Askari-Chaverdi, Callieri 2009; 2012; Askari-Chaverdi, Callieri, Gondet 2013).

<sup>16</sup> On which also our University, through the guidance and expertise of Prof. A.V. Rossi, works for some time, with considerable difficulties of interpretation (Basello, Filippone, Giovanazzo, and Rossi, A.V., eds, 2012).



unique, very particular and quite unusual for the Achaemenid period (Fig. 13). It is safe to say, in fact, that Dahāne-ye Gholāmān (Scerrato 1966a, 1966b; Genito 1987a; 1987b; 1990; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2013) represents, so far, the only urban traces of the Achaemenid period. The plans of the public buildings (2 and 3 in particular) with a layout strictly at right angles and four side porches, have led one to think that in this suburban area architectural principles were adopted, perhaps inspired by the “central” architectural order of the imperial dynastic “power”. Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, from a cultural point of view, simultaneously includes strong elements of discontinuity and continuity: the first given by the urban character of the remains which are unprecedented in the area, with the only exception of the proto-historical Shahr-i Sokhta, to circa 40 km north-east; the second given by the massive use of traditional mud clay material of construction.

Building no 3 highlights an ideological traditional ritual of a community (Scerrato 1966a, 1966b; 1979), since the beginning of the excavation and of the analyses and studies, interpreted as ideologically connected to the fire-cult (Gnoli 1993) (Fig. 15). One is probably dealing with the ideological unification processes of popular local beliefs, only partly comparable to the successive ideological codification, evidently being widespread over the territory (Scerrato 1979). Regardless of other considerations, the religiosity that is observed in that monument reinforces the idea that the urban context where Dahāne-ye Gholāmān is located may have constituted the one of a very important capital or of a centre of a very similar character. The lack of any artistic evidence prevents one to connote Dahāne-ye Gholāmān of that significant importance to be effectively compared to the ruins of Persepolis and Pasargadae. It would have been very useful to compare the imperial character of the courtly art production of the central capitals with a similar, displaced character in one of the distant suburbs. This impossibility may reinforce the idea that the “imperial” archaeological horizon was able to, concentrate almost exclusively at the center of the state, and that the peripheral areas, as for example in this case Sistan, did not participate, in practice, to the more general cultural movements of the time!

In Dahāne-ye Gholāmān an artistic evidence was missing, whereas abundant, instead, was in Persepolis and present, to a lesser extent, and with different characteristics, also in Pasargadae. The figures represented mainly on the two northern and western stairways of the place of assembly, the *apadana*, in Persepolis, constitute a kind of iconographic anthology with important ethnographic, or ethno-archaeological implications and of *summa*

*enciclopedia* of the cultural knowledge of the time, as one would say today. The groups of peoples depicted represent, according to the majority of the scholarly interpretations, and to the iconographic order, the so-called delegations belonging to the different *dahyu* (pl. *dahyāva*) (Greek name *satrapēiē*) of the empire, the list of which (a controversial issue indeed too), as is known, is located on some of the most important dynastic official epigraphic remains (Old Persian inscriptions). The figures bring different clothes, personal belongings and objects, animals, inserted into scenes of “embassies” with gifts, or ritual, in a wider *scenario* of a collective solemn ceremony possibly occurred for the new year in Persepolis, which, in the 50s, was supposed to be a ritual city (Pope 1957).<sup>17</sup>

Among these representations there are also those of the delegation representing, for some scholars, the characters of Drangiana, variant of the ancient Greek-Latin term of *Zranka*.<sup>18</sup>

The other major archaeological “urban and/or architectural” reference of ancient Iran is Pasargadae 80 km north-east of Persepolis, where, thanks to the work of David Stronach in the 60s (1980), it was possible to re-interpret the data already been partially excavated and brought to light by the Americans in the 30s. In this case too, it is not possible to talk, as in Persepolis, about the existence of a proper city or even a settlement, and only of that of large buildings (an *atrium*, a lobby, a place of assembly, the still enigmatic Zendan-e Suleyman and the so-called Cyrus’ tomb. These buildings are located in a specific order in the plain of the Murghab river, and disposed within and between gardens of which in the 60s channels of

<sup>17</sup> Scenes of the most important feast, perhaps one of those most felt today by the Iranian people, and especially one of the very few feasts on a fixed date, stable, and, unlike other, variable, based on the lunar calendar.

<sup>18</sup> In the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, Drangiana is listed as a separate province, but its position varies; it was located either between Parthia and Aria (DB, DPe, and the restored portion of DS<sub>m</sub>), between Chorasmia and Arachosia (DN<sub>a</sub>, the restored portion of DS<sub>e</sub>, and the late tomb inscription A?P), or even, owing to an awkward rearrangement of the text, before Parthia and Aria and after Armenia (XPh). On the other hand, in Herodotus’ tribute list (Fausti, a cura di, 1984a Vol. II, Libri, III-IV, 3.93.2) the Sarangians, Sagartians, Thamanæans, Utians, Mycians (i.e., all the peoples living in the lands extending from the Iranian central desert through Baluchistan to the Persian Gulf), and neighboring islanders were included in the fourteenth tax district, required to pay the relatively high amount of 600 talents annually. In Xerxes’ army the Sarangian contingent was led by Pherendátēs, son of Megabazus; the men were armed with Median bows and lances and wore brightly colored clothes and knee-high boots (Fausti, a cura di, 1984b, Vol. III, Libri, V-VI-VII, 7.67.1). Barsaē’ntēs, satrap of Arachosia and Drangiana, was one of the accomplices of the usurper Bessos against the last Achaemenid king, Darius III (Sisti, a cura di, 2001, Arrian 3.21.1; Atkinson, Gargiulo, a cura di, 2000, Curtius Rufus, 6.6.36); the combination of these two provinces in a single satrapy cannot be dated exactly.

flow of water were also highlighted (Fig. 16). In Pasargadae, unlikely from the great anthology of iconographic depictions of the alleged delegations of Persepolis, on some of the piers of the buildings iconographic figures are depicted referring to the stylistic tradition of ancient Egypt, Assyrian world and of the Near East in general; this makes of the complex and heterogeneous cultural universe inspiring them, a still complicated puzzle to be deciphered.

Even today these are the main scientific aspects from which to start, even though much of what one may see at Persepolis, Pasargadae, do not exist at Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, and this is an incontrovertible fact. You might observe that a generally accepted consideration tells us that if there is no artistic evidence, then one cannot talk about a capital city, and one knows now that it is not exclusively like this! And another generally accepted consideration tells us that if there is no epigraphic evidence, one cannot talk about a capital, and also in this case, one knows now that it is not exactly as such. The “urban” dimension and the particular characterization of channels, public and private buildings, in Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, including one definitely religious in character, suggest, much more than one might think, the reality of a complex center. this may be defined, for an order above, political, the nature of which remains to be attributed.

The long debated question related to the origin, development, and the different modes and ways into which the ancient “urban” traces occurred in the ancient Near East, have always been particularly fascinating; even whether it was, apparently and systematically out of stock on the grandiose background of the comprehensive concept of the “city”.

The important “urban” Mesopotamian and Greek-Roman model of cities has completely conditioned the research and the interpretative criteria which different scholars, from different point of view (economic, political, sociological, literary, anthropological) have always dealt with.

Provocatively the geo-cultural category of “Mesopotamia and surroundings” (Liverani 2013, V) has strongly oriented for decades the whole way of thinking of the great or less great scholars who substantially have continuously consider the city as an immutable and clearly geographically and territorially defined territorial entity, in front of which the other remains, not classifiable in that category, disappeared or were completely neglected to the attention of the most.

Thinking to re-orient the issue of such a consolidated tradition of the early-orientalist school is not an easy task, especially for those that come

from the classical archaeology and implemented the led to that of the ancient Near East and, in particular, to Iran. Here the rather strict ideological equation village=city=civilization=state=empire (behind which stands the complex and well accepted “revolutionary” concepts of “Neolithic” and “Urban” revolution of Gordon Childe) does not find its easy location in areas and territories where the very concepts of cities, urban planning, urbanization present quite a few, but important differences, still to be completely analyzed and detected among the most of the scholars.

The dense and profound opinion that one may perform provides the size and the amount to which one wants to be guided with this perspective; Robert McCornick Adams, American field archaeologist, among the most brilliant and prepared of the last century, has brought to the fore a particularly significant contribution in this context.

And this is a clear first fundamental question that every scholar, as rightly it should be pointed out and put in such a study: the difficult relationship between East and West, also in relation to the ancient world, and particularly to the difficult and complex interpretation of the city remains, and of the ideas of a city as you may derive both from the epigraphic-philological and archaeological pictures. Which essentially can be the differences and similarities between “urban” contexts of such different great civilizations? Especially what is the relationship between the modernity and the tradition? The colonialism and neo-colonialism? Inside which the traditions of studies of humanities, social, physical, natural and computer sciences originated and developed? Among the many fragments with which the cultural events of the West formed, the one lacking was certainly that related to the way the cities of the ancient Near East were imagined and visualized, designed and rebuilt through two centuries of archaeological excavations and studies. Whilst understandable and fully shareable are the deep intellectual motivations quoted by scholars, it is still hard to believe that there is a link between the handed down image of the élites about the ancient cities, in particular, of people who has left us abundant written evidences, and what can concretely be archaeologically attributed to this or that city. The concepts of the image of a city may find different perspectives of interpretation according to the picture one wants to leave and utilize.

Great Mesopotamia between 3500 and 500 BC, and also in a suburb gradually faded over time (from the proto-historical and classic, late antique premises and Islamic developments) and in space (from Egypt and the Aegean to Iran, southern Arabia, the Indus Valley, Central Asia). The

skills required by such a thematic framework, chronological and spatial, can range from archaeology (historical and proto-historical) to the philology of the ancient Near East (Assyriology, Sumerology, Hittology, Egyptology, Semitics, Iranian studies); but also history of urbanism and architecture, art history, graphic design, urban sociology, social anthropology, XIX theories of macro-economic onwards, of evolutionism and neo-evolutionism, neo-Marxism and neo-liberalism, of village communities and agricultural landscape, of despotism and theocracy, of political events in Europe and the Ottoman empire, colonialism and decolonization, globalization and localism, of neo-geographical approaches and systems theory, graphics computerized and remote sensing, and who knows how much more. In this difficult methodological and theoretical issue, lies in my opinion the urban character of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, between the far consolidated and well documented city tradition of the ancient Near-East, and the diverse peripheral out-centered tradition of Central Asia.

#### ***masjed-e jom'e of Isfahan***

The work in this monument, started with a restoration and conservation activities in the main buildings of the city of Isfahan, headed by Eugenio Galdieri, was aimed in particular at identifying the earlier constructional phases of the building. The Italian archaeological team of IsMEO, succeeded in clarifying, on an architectural basis, specific significant points. These results, together with the information by the ancient sources about the existence of a village in the area of the mosque, led IsMEO to start an archaeological research under the *qibla* area. The archaeological project was, thus, aimed at carrying out trial-trenches on the monument and to verify the static condition of the foundations of the building, in order to try to complete the historical, archaeological and artistic knowledge of the monument in itself and of the area on which it stand. At the end of 1972 the restoration in the *masjid-e jom'e* was more properly followed by an archaeological activity carried out by IsMEO, UNO and Rome Universities's teams, headed by Umberto Scerrato continuing up to 1978 (Figs. 17, 18).

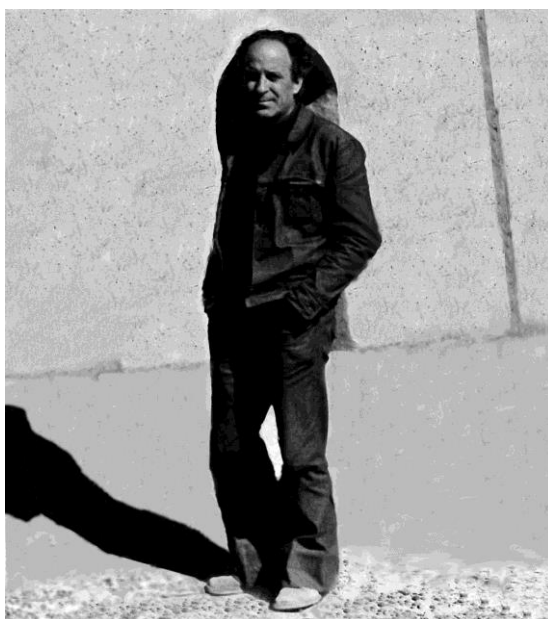
After the Islamic Revolution an Italian team of archaeologists could go back again in Iran only in 2002, starting a new project entitled ADAMJI (Fig. 19), in order to resume a digital catalogue of the archaeological data from the *masjid- e jom'e*. During the extensive excavations a very important

contribution has been given to the historical reconstruction of the different constructional phases of the Mosque. The presence under the area of the sanctuary (area 190) of a possibly important construction, marked by a base of a column decorated in stucco, identified and dated to the Sasanian period, leads one to think that, most probably, the courtyard of the mosque corresponded to a formerly-existing open space. The excavation in the northern area were also most encouraging, enabling one to ascertain that the round columns out of plumb owe their condition to the precariousness of the foundations. In fact the mosque was built on mud-brick structures obliquely oriented (north-east-south-west) with respect to the axis of *qibla*. The northern structures in mud brick, which were revealed in almost all the places where trial-excavations were carried out, seem to be attributable in part to the Sasanian period and were built and reused, even quite extensively, in the Islamic time, and must belong to the ancient town of Yahūdiyya. The excavations carried out inside the pavilion of Tāj al-Mul'k to North, have shown that, from the very beginning, it was definitely closed on two sides. Below the original Seljuq floor level of the Tāj al-Mul'k pavilion there was a filling containing numerous potsherds of artificial-paste, Seljuq-type pottery and other pottery having painted decoration under lead glaze, the latter being of rather inferior quality. In the trials effected in the courtyard traces of the pre-existing mosques were not found. It will be remembered that al-Mafarrukhi, writing during the period of Malik Shāh, states that the *masjed-e jom'e* of Yahūdiyya was founded by the Arabs of Tiran in the third quarter of the 8th century, rebuilt during the caliphate of al-Mu'tasim in 840-841 and then extended under the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (908-932). The style of the stuccoes found *in situ* in the northern area is not in contradiction with this interpretation. Amongst other important results, the activity has put definitely in evidence that the mosque was first built up on an already inhabited area,<sup>19</sup> probably in 772, *i.e.* at the end of al-Mansur (754-772 AD) caliphate. The wall discovered in the area of the sanctuary belongs to this first mosque and was obliquely orientated, differently with regard to the plan of Seljuq time; it presents polychrome stucco decoration comparable with those of the *masjed-e jom'e* of Nayin and with those discovered in the Sirāf mosque. The excavation has given evidence for about the half of the *qiblī* of

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<sup>19</sup> Probably it is the famous village of Yahūdiyya, contiguous to that of Yavan, information derived by the historian Abū Nu'aym (948-1038) who also locates at Isfahan the building of the mosque in the place of an old Nestorian church; by other sources it is known that in the Isfahan area, a bishop's seat existed already in 430 AD.

this first mosque, certainly one of the earliest datable, among those up to now known in Iran (Fontana *infra*, figs. 1, 2, 3). The wall in mud bricks was constituted by few rows and contained a square *mihrāb*, not very much distant from the modern; in the western side of the prayer hall the *qiblī* is kept, at least, in other two sectors 204 and 205 for an height of about 0,90m and goes, then, in the 218-219 sectors. According to Abu Nu‘aym, this could be the original mosque near Yahūdiyya in 156 H./772 AD, *i.e.* towards the end of the al-Mansur caliphate. The *qiblī* presented a rich moulded stucco decoration, whose few traces remained in the *mihrāb* niche. Its lower part has a small tendril motif, with thin grape leaves, originating from a sort of a central tree’s trunk; on the right side there are remains of a panel decorated by an interwoven band of roundels delimitating small grape leaves. Amongst those stuccoes up to now documented, these found at the *masjed-e jom‘e* of Isfahān constitute a rare, though perhaps not unique evidence of the stucco art in the Iranian territory and are of great importance also for the stucco art in the Syro-Mesopotamian area, relatively less known as far as between the half of the 8th century and Samarra periods is concerned. Most part of the stuccoes models are clearly referable to a Syro-Alexandrine style tradition, and it is evident an early cultural contact with the Iranian Sasanian sensibility. Thus, whether one can easily recognise the Alexandrine iconography, the stylisation and composition are Sasanian as it is evident in the symmetric composition with the grape or *acanthus* leaves. It is useful to compare the panels of the *qiblī* at Isfahan with the stucco art of the second half of the 8th century, found in a Raqqa palace and datable to the time of Hārūn al Rashīd. On the other hand it is also natural to make comparisons with the stucco decorations of the late Omayyad architecture and with those of Khirbet al-Mafjar in Cisgiordania or Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi in Syria, which could be easily explained with the diffusion of the Sasanian interpretation of the vegetal Alexandrine motives, through the stucco art, basically belonging to the Iranian artistic culture.



**Figs. 1-2** - Umberto Scerrato in the 60s in Sistan, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. nos 3020\_03 and L 10896-01

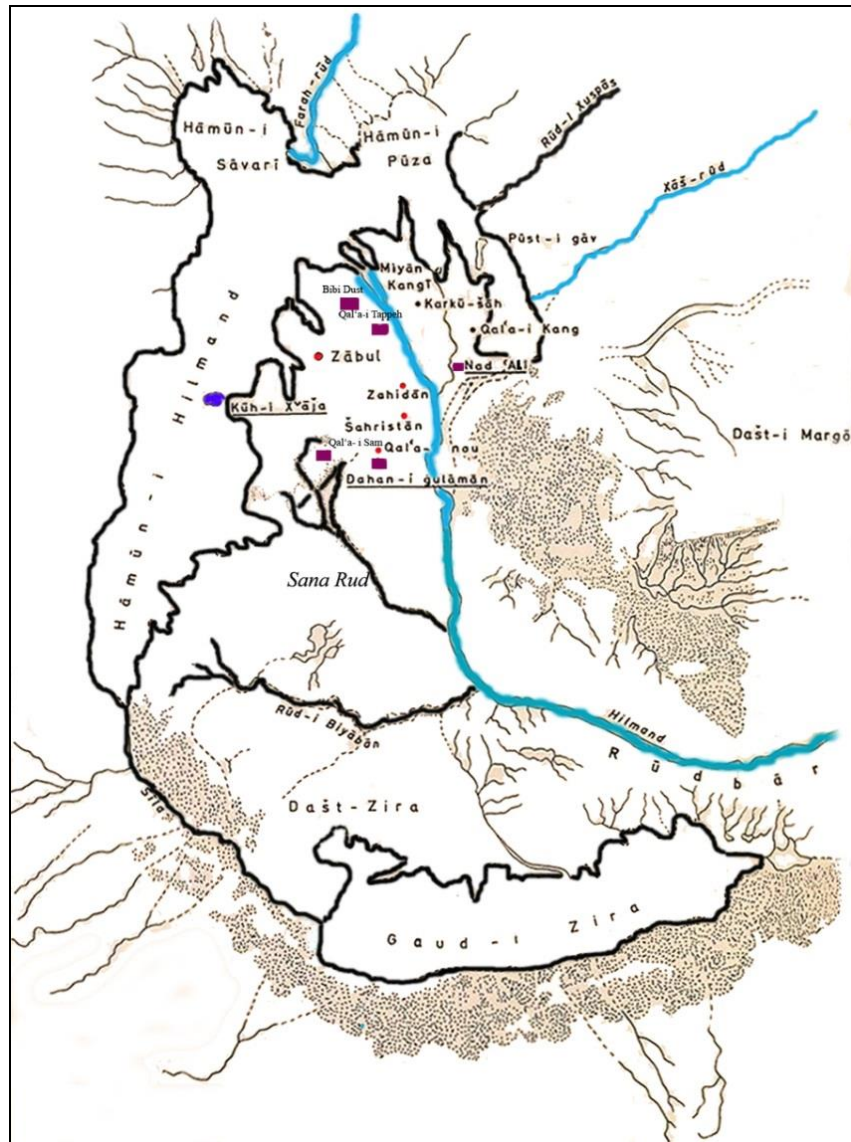




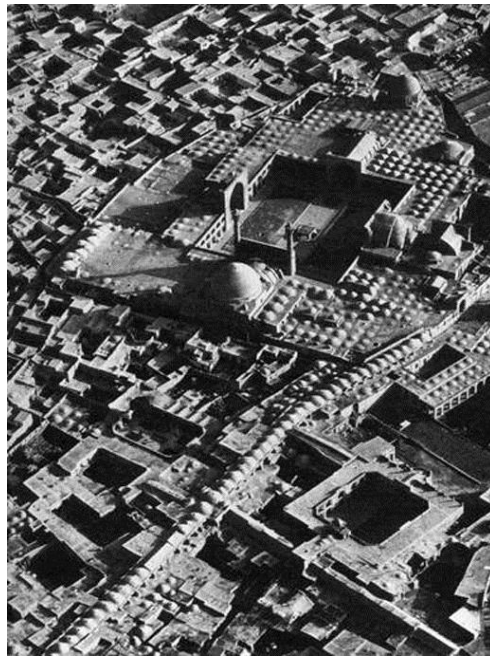
**Fig. 3** - Umberto Scerrato at Isfahan in 1974 with workmen, from MAI, IsMEO



**Fig. 4** - The last mission of Umberto Scerrato at Isfahan in 2000, from MAI, IsIAO, Dep. Cs. 2000, DSCN3323



**Fig. 5** - Main sites discovered and worked out by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Iran in the 60s of last century, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no 1509, from an original by Tullio Tamagnini with some integrations by the author, up to date to the 70s



**Fig.- 6a** - Aerial photo of the masjed- e jom'e Isfahān, in the 30s of the last century, from Schroeder 1938-39

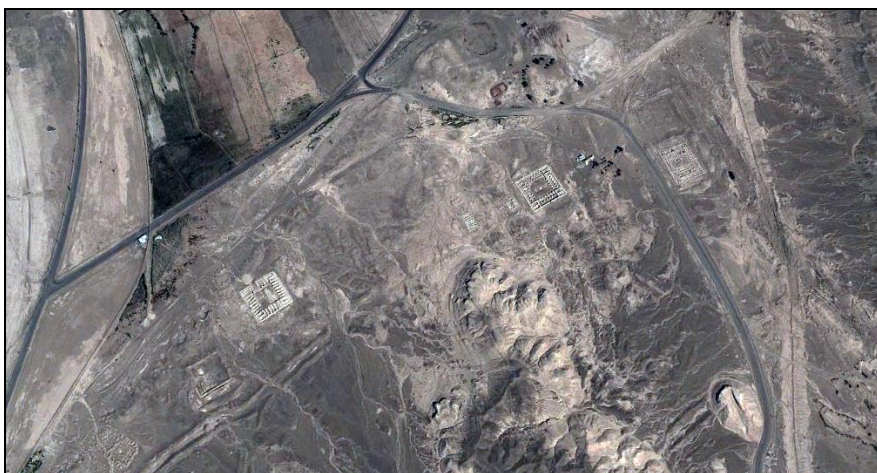


**Fig.- 6b** - Aerial photo of the masjed- e jom'e Isfahān, after google earth

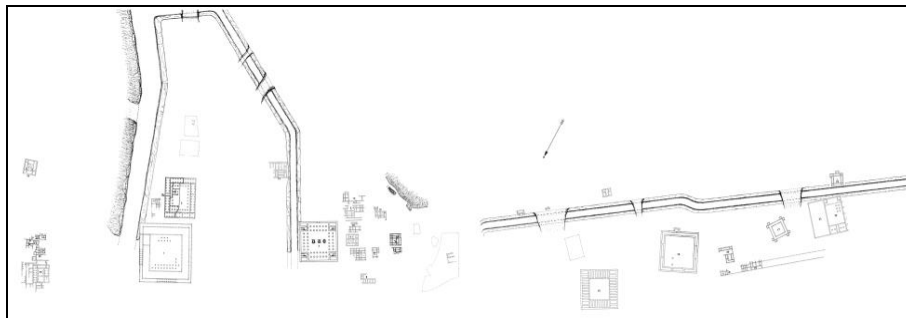




**Fig. 7** - The cut in the desertic terrace overlooking the archaeological remains of Dahān-ye Gholāmān suggesting a real opening/gate, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no DG12744\_04



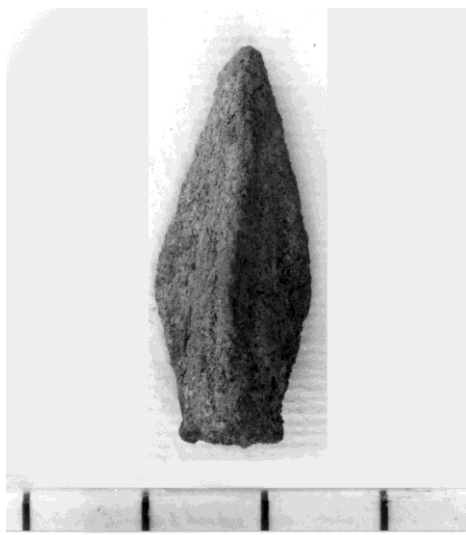
**Fig. 8** - The layout of the city with all the buildings, excavated and non, from Google earth



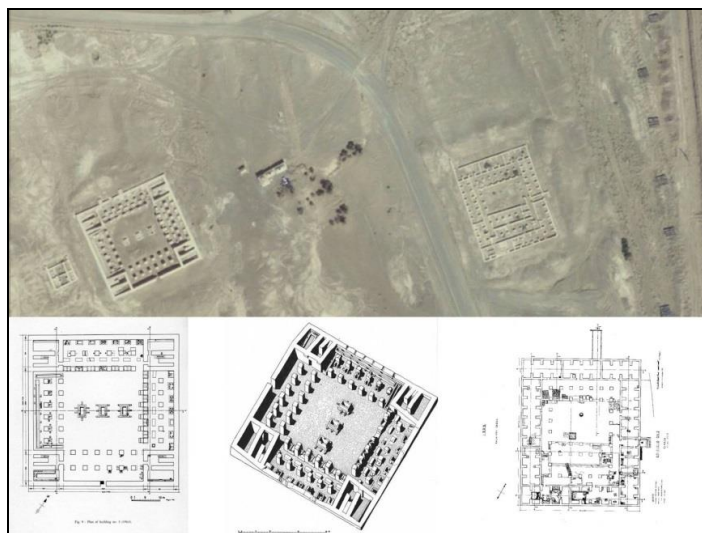
**Fig. 9** - The archaeological remains of Dahāne-ye Gholāmān with traces of channel, and the main buildings, excavated and not excavated, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no DG-1082A



**Fig. 10** - Neo-Babylonian style stone seal with animal decorative patterns, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no DG50-FB191-8



**Fig. 11** - Three-aisled bronze arrow-head of the Scythian tradition, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no DG1-FB123-2



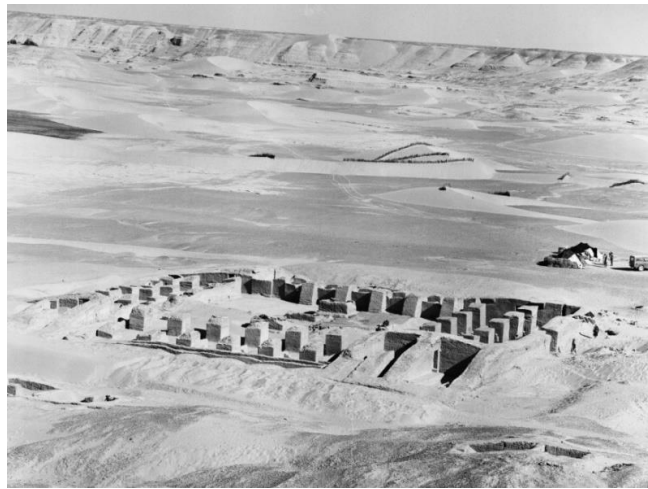
**Fig. 12** - Buildings nos 3, and 2, after Google earth above, and maps from MAI, IsMEO below (plan and axonometric reconstruction of Building no 3 Dep. Cs. nos DG1083, DG1410, and of Building no 2, Dep. Cs. no DG4804)



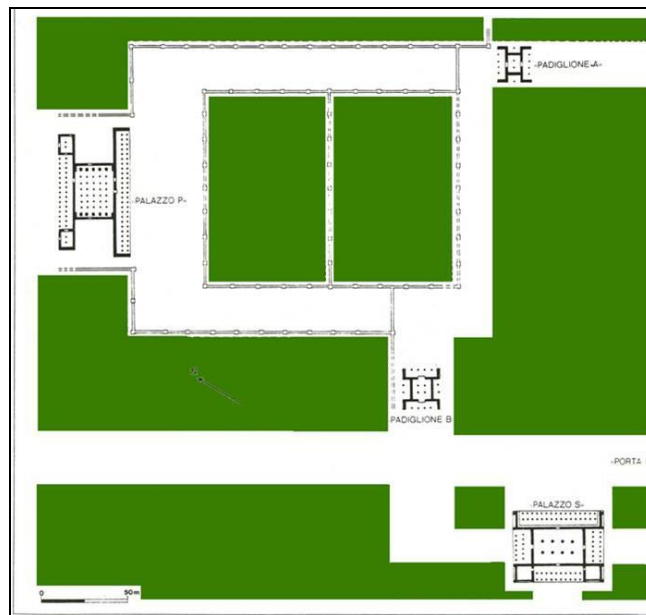
**Fig. 13** - The layout of Dahāne-yē Gholāmān and the maps of the buildings, after Google earth above, and from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no DG4799, below



**Fig. 14** - The layout of Persepolis, after Google earth



**Fig. 15** - Dahāne-ye Gholāmān, Building no 3, after the excavation, from Scerrato 1966a, fig. 8, MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no 2755\_05



**Fig. 16** - The layout of the buildings in Pasargade, from the reconstruction of Stronach (1980) with some integration of the author



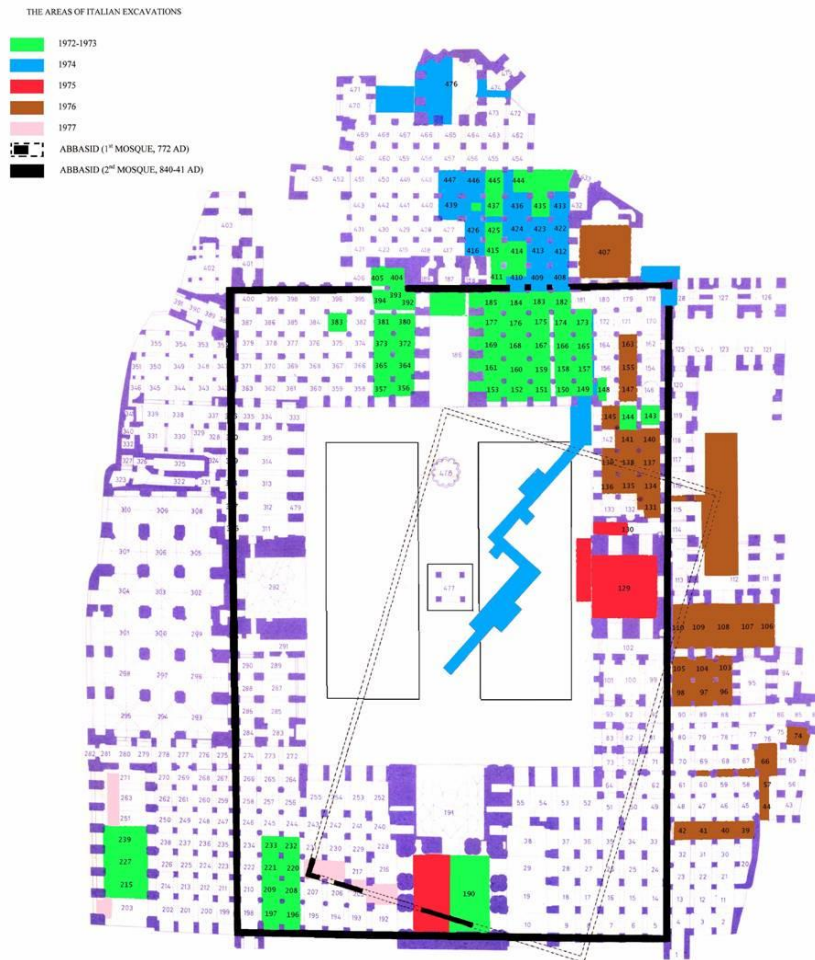
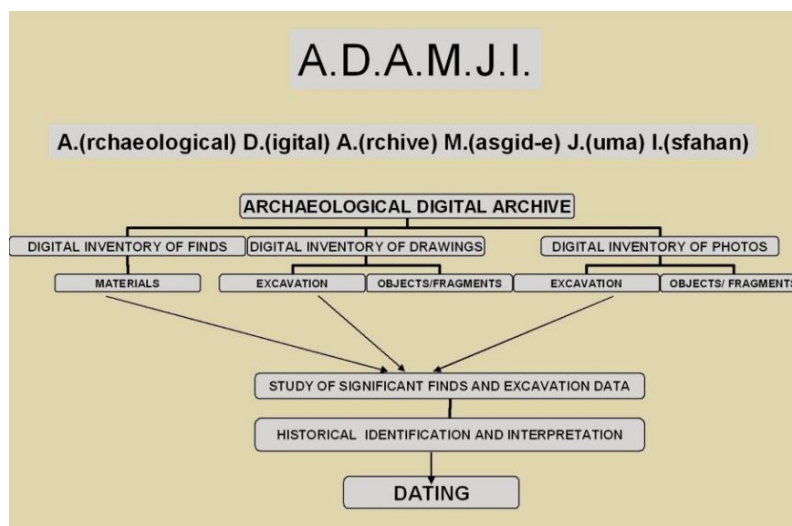


Fig. 17 - The excavation sectors of masjed-e jom'eh in Isfahan from 1972 to 1977, by MAI 2010, from IsIAO, from an original by Nicola Olivieri 1977



**Fig. 18** - The excavation under the floor of sector 190 in the masjed-e jom'ce, with the oblique oriented *qibla* and the base of the column Sasanian in style, from MAI, IsMEO, Dep. Cs. no 121814/31



**Fig. 19** - Schema of different stages of the ADAMJI project during 2003-2010, from MAI, IsIAO