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## THE BRONZES OF LURISTAN

FREYA STARK

SO little is known about the bronzes of Luristan, and their interest to the archaeologist and historian is so great, that any one who has had the good fortune to enter at all into that little-known country is justified in recounting his experiences. I was able to travel last October from Nihavand over the Varazan pass to Khava, thence to Alishtar, back again through Khava into Dilfan, and from Dilfan by Chavari through Duliskan to Tudaru, which seems to be at present the southern limit for the police of the district; thence I went south half a day's ride along the Gizarud and up a little valley, hitherto unnamed on the maps, which I discovered to be that of the Kangaveri river, leading to Sari Kashti, the northern centre for the Luristan bronzes, in a landscape full of ancient looted cemeteries. I had no opportunity to see more than one grave actually being opened, and I am no expert to develop theories about them, but it may be useful to put down all I could notice or discover, and leave it to minds better equipped to draw conclusions. I have written elsewhere the account of the actual travelling and its adventures, and will confine myself to what concerns the graves and their possible history. Special interest has been centred on those graves which are said to contain the trappings of horses and chariots, for the origins of the people who used such things may throw light on the coming of the horse into Persia. When the bronzes first appeared on the market, carried by tribesmen over the Luristan passes to Kermanshah or to Harsin, it was thought that the plains of Alishtar and Khava would be the home of this horse-breeding nation; for these plains were supposed, after Sir H. Rawlinson marched across and saw them in 1836, to be the Nisaian pasture lands of the Achaemenian kings. But though the two plains are sprinkled with old mounds and cemeteries, I could find nothing there belonging to a horse, nor had any grave with a horse's skeleton inside it been found there. There is a mound by a village called Qal'a Kafrash in Khava where I found a shard of early Islamic painted ware, a carved arabesque on pale green background. There is another mound at Beira, also in Khava, where a bronze dagger had been found. In the south of Khava there are graveyards round the great mound of Cheha Husein, and the people told me that bronzes had been found there; nothing however of the more elaborate kind of Luristan work with carved masks and animals, and nothing in the way of harness.

In Alishtar it was the same. The site of the ancient city of Alishtar is full of gravestones of a peculiar kind, about 5 feet by 2 feet, with a scroll of ornament or Arabic script running round them, and a carved knob at each corner; near them on the ground one may pick up fragments of Islamic glazed ware; and one comes upon these tombstones elsewhere in Alishtar, at the old village of Deh Ram for instance. There is the tradition that, on the site of the ruined city, an old minaret still existed a few years ago when the Government troops, who were destroying the power of Mir Ali Khan, razed it to the ground as a possible stronghold for rebels: from the descriptions I was able to obtain this minaret must have been something like that of Savch, a plain tubular shape covered with ornamented brickwork: the bricks are still lying about; the site seems to

have been that of a large cemetery, and all points to a flourishing Islamic community continuing well into the fourteenth century, when Mustawfi does in fact mention Alishtar as an important town in Kurdistan. The local legends are also Islamic, and go back perhaps to the time of the Moslem conquest. They say that the three chief cities of the Unbelievers were the mounds of Gian (where Dr. Contenau is now digging near Nihavand), Qal'a Kafrash in Khava, and Geraran in the north-east corner of Alishtar: here are their buried treasures. The legends of Khava further relate that Hazrat-i-Amir 'Ali stood on the hill of Kurrakamendar on the southern edge of Khava, and thence with one stroke of his sword destroyed the capital of the Unbelievers at Qal'a Kafrash, and would have gone on to destroy the whole race of mankind if the angel Gabriel had not held his arm. All this points to Islamic times and links the two plains with the general history of Moslem Persia, and there is further the tradition of an old causeway over the Gatchkah pass and Kuh Garu, to join Alishtar and Khava to Nihavand and the north. I found a few older objects among the Islamic in Alishtar: some glass beads, silver earrings of the usual Luristan type, and a bronze arrow-head; but could not ascertain the exact spot where they had been found.

As soon as one leaves the eastern and northern sides of the plains, where the settled villages now are and probably have been for a very long time, and especially as one comes south of Khava into Dilfan, the traces of much earlier settlements become more and more frequent; though even here I came upon no sign of the horse trappings I was seeking. The first prehistoric objects I found were five stones like rough cubes, about 2 or 3 inches on every side, so rough indeed that I was in doubt whether they might not be natural shapes until a few days later they brought me one obviously worn and shaped by human agency, found in a grave. These stones were placed as votive offerings in a little enclosure surrounded by a low wall of heaped boulders at the foot of the Gatchkah pass. The place is called Dukkan Daud, the Shop of David; and I learnt nothing about it except that it had been a holy place for a very long time. I next went into Dilfan and spent two days with the Nurali Lurs there in the valley of Gatchenah, also hitherto unnamed on the maps. It must have been inhabited for a long period, for in the lower part one comes upon bits of glazed Islamic ware and mounds that seem to be the remains of buildings; and as one rides further, one finds the place lined on either side with what look like old buried habitations and with cemeteries. The rifling of these has been going on to such an extent that it is now difficult to discover an unopened grave quickly, and the tribesmen searched about for me all day in vain. As I waited, I spent my time in getting information from as many different people as I could, and was told that three, and possibly four, separate kinds of grave have been opened in this valley.

The first are rectangular ones of the kind I was to find next morning, in which the skeleton lies on its side with its knees crouched up, and where, they told me, no objects except pottery and flints are found. These graves are lined with rough upright stones and covered with flat slabs, very roughly shaped, a method of roofing common to all the tombs in this district. The men told me that the skeletons are always oriented with their heads to the south. The second kind of grave is like the above in shape, except that the skeleton's head

is laid towards the east; the knees are likewise bent to one side. Bronzes and flints are here found together, and especially flint knives about 10 inches long, which are never found in the former type of grave. The bronzes appear to be very varied. The spear-head lies on the breast of the buried man, the axe-heads under his neck or at his side, the weapons near his right hand: earthenware pots below his feet or above his head. His idols, when there are any, are placed close to his breast on the left side. And the ornaments of the women, bracelets, anklets, bronze belts, torques, etc., are all found in their usual places on the skeleton. The third kind of grave is round, about 3 feet in diameter, also lined with rough stones and covered with slabs, and the skeletons appear to have been put in in a sitting posture. Bronzes are found here and possibly flints, but I could get no very unanimous information on this point. These graves are very numerous, scattered, opened and empty, all over the district. The fourth is an interesting sort of grave which properly belongs to the Tarhan country farther south; the people call them Lihaq, and they are long and narrow, the length of three horses, one man said, probably exaggerating. They contain very numerous skeletons, and they are roofed with flat slabs put on end like a penthouse. In the south, near Tarhan, their sides are sometimes properly walled and finished on the inside with plaster, and skeletons of horses are said to be found among the human bones; but nothing of this sort had ever been seen in Dilfan. One of my hosts told me he could show me some of these Lihags about 4 miles away, and we rode off confidently only to find that, whatever there may have been, the stones had now been carried off and nothing but a number of shapeless holes remained; and, if it had not been for the man's confidence, and the fact that he had seen them himself and led me without hesitation to the exact spot, I should have doubted the existence of Lihags so far north, for I heard no further report of them till I reached Sari Kashti. All these statements I give for what they are worth as tribesmen's evidence, though I was always careful to get the corroboration of several people, and to question them separately.

Meanwhile I was unable to get any of the flint knives: they had all been thrown away as valueless. I got a good many bronzes, of the simple Luristan type. Unless one actually sees it dug up, it is very difficult to be sure exactly where an object comes from; more than half the things I saw in Dilfan had been dug up in the "Garmsir" of Tarhan or Kuh-i-Dasht; the tribes move south every autumn and back again in spring, and carry all their possessions with them. I was not able to buy much owing to the danger of appearing to have money in this insecure country; but I handled a great number, and found out where they came from as far as I could, and got an impression that the simpler and ruder things come from the rectangular graves, while the really elaborate work comes from the southern country. This however is only a personal impression.

Next morning the tribesmen scattered again in little groups over the lower slopes of the hills. The system of treasure hunting is now thoroughly elaborated and has evidently come from much practice. Men go out with stout skewers about a yard long which they dig into the ground at intervals: if they hit a flat surface about 2 feet underground, they try again close by in suitable places, and if the surface appears to continue in the shape of a presumable grave, they



*Kangaveri valley, looking east*



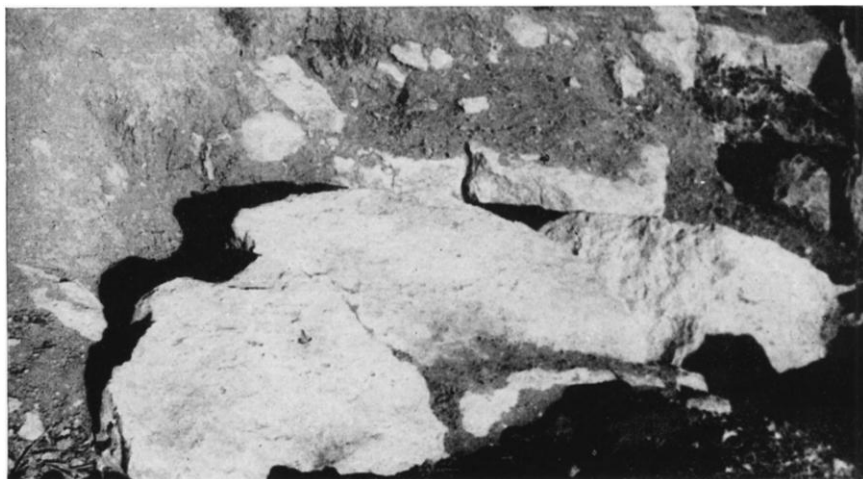
*Dilfan: searching for graves with a skewer*



*Mound of Qal'a Kafrash*



*Graveyard at Dilfan*



*Long grave at Dilfan*



*Circular looted grave at Dilfan*

gather hopefully to dig. Towards the end of the morning shouts of triumph and several small Lurs cantering down the hill announced a find. I arrived just in time to prevent the skeleton from being hacked to pieces in an excess of zeal. It was a poor grave, of the simplest kind, lying below a cornfield whose shallow ploughing had not disturbed it, though the stones, if there ever were any, had been pulled up. The skeleton lay with its head pointing south, its knees gathered up towards the west, and its feet to the north. Two little flints were under its head, and a few shards of very coarse earthenware at its back. It was a meagre find. Another object, which had been discovered close by in the same sort of grave a short while before was now brought me; it was a large pot of greyish earthenware with a dark brown flame-like design, unglazed, rising towards the neck from horizontal bands of the same colour. It was an exact replica of the rougher kind of ware now being excavated at Gian-Nihavand. Small broken pots had been found inside it. I bought it, and also brought away an unglazed bowl tinted with pinkish earth colour: another pot of very heavy earthenware, square, with a round top, of which I had also seen many at Nihavand, was offered me but had to be left. Even a small amount of luggage is a real danger in this part of Luristan. The police have built a road which they patrol with a series of small guard towers, though no car has yet ventured along it; south of the road they do not venture except in force. I had only the protection of one Lur guide and a very terrified Persian muleteer, and this insecurity made the acquisition of every new object a matter for serious thought. Such as it was, the day's digging was now over; I had indeed had great difficulty in getting as much done as I did, since the Government are making a real effort to stop the looting of these graves and have visited many of the tribal chiefs with fines; the result is that they now only open the graves when no one is about.

They gave me a wild but handsome guide known to the next tribe—an absolutely essential requisite in this country—and we rode along the western edge of Khava, over rolling downs covered with small holes where gum tragacanth is gathered, to Chavari, where there are many Ali Ilahis credited with the power of eating fire, possibly remnants of the old fire worshippers of Qal'a Kafraash. Thence from Deh Kabud, the chief village of the plain, we went to Duliskan, which is the most northern settlement of the Ittivend Lurs. Every one who seemed to know about it was unanimous in saying that all the best bronzes, and the horse skeletons, are found in the country of the Ittivends, which is unfortunate, since this tribe has a particularly bad reputation. The commercial centre, to which Jewish merchants have a precarious access by paying blackmail in the form of ammunition to the bandits who hold the passes, is south-west of Khava at Sari Kashti, in a lonely valley not, I think, hitherto visited by Europeans. I was told however that I might possibly also find something as far north as Duliskan. In this I was disappointed. The graves of Duliskan appeared to be identical with those of Dilfan; and there was nothing to do with a horse among the one hundred or so bits of bronze brought for my inspection. We therefore decided to risk Sari Kashti, and began by travelling south to Tudaru or Tuyaru, which is a little tongue of Kakavend inserting itself into the Ittivend country, and is the most southern bit of land in this region to come at all under police control. Here I heard of circular graves with the skeleton inside them enclosed in a jar. As usual, I could not see one for

myself, but they showed me one of the jars at Tarazak near by. It was 21 inches in height, 18 inches in diameter, with an opening of 9 inches made of rough reddish earthenware with four little holes near the top to pass a cord through. It had been found standing upright, with two skulls inside it, the opening closed by another smaller jar coated with green glaze. They told me that many of these jars are found not upright but lying on their side.

I now began to feel more hopeful, for circular graves with horses *had* been found in this neighbourhood. The real country for them however, they all repeated unanimously, was farther south. We left the safety of Tudaru and rode through the defile of Tang Cherash down the Gizarud and up the Kangaveri stream to Sari Kashti, finding looted cemeteries on the low foothills of the valleys near water, which always seems to have been the favourite location. This is a spacious country with cultivation here and there but no houses other than the black nomad tents. One rides at one's own risk. Sari Kashti, like Duliskan, Dulfan, Tudaru, Tarazak, and indeed all the names here, refer only to regions with rather vague boundaries, and not to places in our sense of the word. Sari Kashti is really the northern side of a big hill called Bala Buzurg, a grazing ground for the Ittivend in summer; their tents were scattered here in small colonies. I had only a day's leave in this dangerous district, as it was not safe for the police to escort me and they were very reluctant to let me go at all. As the authorities had been more than kind all through, I felt I could not overstay their permission more than one day at most. This made my chance of finding an unopened grave almost nil, and in fact I had realized for some time that a successful expedition into this part of Luristan would need planning in quite a different way from my own preparations, which had been intended only for Alishtar and Khava. I was further unlucky in not finding the head of the Sari Kashti Ittivends at home, and though the tribesmen were finally induced to stick their skewers here and there into the hillside, and we spent one hopeful hour digging up two boulders, by the time evening came I knew that I must give up all hope of actually seeing what I had come to see.

I heard more about the Lihag graves, though the Ittivends corroborated the Dulfan tribesmen and told me that their real centre is farther south; those that are found here are covered over with flat-lying slabs and not with the penthouse slabs characteristic of Tarhan. The horse is sometimes discovered inside them, but most usually is found in the round graves either quite alone or beside the man with its head by his right hand. Arrow-heads are occasionally wedged in the bones, apparently stuck at random and not aimed at any one particular place. The horse, they told me, is shod with a solid bronze plate curved so as to catch in the hoof at the back and fastened in front with one screw. That the screw was known to these bronze workers would appear from an object brought me from the Kuh-i-Dasht, a hollow tube like the stick of a candlestick evidently meant to screw on to some stand.

Among the objects which I saw were numbers of cornelian beads and green glass beads, bronze pendants, pomegranates, animal heads, the model of a small jug in bronze, anklets, bracelets, daggers and axes, torques, bowls, bodkins, maceheads, a silver earring of the shape of the Sumerian earrings in the Baghdad Museum, bronze buttons, late cornelian seals (? Sassanian), many beads that appeared to be Parthian or Sassanian, and, of uncertain locality,

some bronze beads threaded on to a bracelet; everywhere there were numbers of shell ornaments. From Kuh-i-Dasht there came a bronze funnel-shaped strainer with a handle, and an alabaster bowl; from Gizarud a bronze spoon with a twisted handle, and an Achaemenian cylinder seal, the latter possibly carried up from the south; from Tarazak a very rough bronze plate; and from Duliskan a bronze spear-head with a hole for a rivet. The finds at Sari Kashti were especially interesting; there was a very beautiful bull's head in bronze, and a little headless bronze figure, undoubtedly of Greek origin or influence; I would have liked to buy the latter, as the only Hellenistic specimen I had seen, but they asked more for it than I dared give. Had I known then however that no Hellenistic object has yet been known to come from Luristan and the historic interest of such a find among these Kassite remains, I would have risked a good deal more to get it. Most of these objects belong to well-known types of these bronzes; the last four are, I think, new.

The valley of the Kangaveri is lined with whitish and pink flinty rock. This may have been one of the causes which made it a centre in prehistoric times. The people told me that flints are found in nearly all the graves. They repeated what I had heard in Dilfan, namely that the small flints are found in the graves where there is only pottery, and the long flint knives together with the bronzes; but I was unable to collect any specimens, nor did the people know of any copper in the country. We were in some danger during all our stay among the Ittivends, and I felt so certain of being robbed if I admitted to having money about me that I was glad to get safely away with what I had been able to collect and await a better opportunity for attempting anything further. I had a Kakavend guide who was completely fearless, but found a blood feud waiting for him whenever he stepped beyond the boundary of his tribe. He and my Persian sat turn and turn about at the opening of the tent through the night, guarding ourselves and our horses from our hosts, with the Kangaveri valley flooded in moonlight and scattered with camp fires far below. Next day we rode back up the Gizarud to Tarazak, and came down upon Harsin and motor cars and civilization over a rolling dry country with gentle passes, Daramru, Gahmasir, and Kuh-i-Daud, all belonging to the Kakavend. These valleys, the Gizarud and Kangaveri and all their neighbourhood, are now bare downs; fifty years ago however they were covered with jungle scrub and used to be forest; the charcoal trade is destroying the woods of Luristan at a great rate. It is a surprising thing that the traces of horses are found more, according to the reports, along this wooded strip of the Saidmarreh and its tributaries than in the wide open plain of Alishtar and Khava, so eminently suited to them, one would think. The horse-breeding nation would seem to have travelled along the great river, either up or down.

A few observations force themselves on the notice even of the casual traveller: in the first place the great variety of objects found, so that the civilization of the Luristan Bronzes appears to cover a great many different times and fashions; secondly, the identity of the ware of Dilfan with that of Nihavand, uniting Khava with the civilization to the north of it; thirdly, the localization of the horse trappings and skeletons to the Saidmarreh region. Customs and traditions in countries which have not been revolutionized by new means of transport vary very slowly, and it is perhaps worth mentioning in this connection

that the district between Duliskan and Tarhan, where the graves with harness are found, is still considered the best for horses. These Lurs set great store by their ponies. As we rode along my man, whose mare had just been poisoned by some enemy, was consoled with by all his friends: "May it be added to your own life," they all said, as if he had lost a wife or a son. Fourthly, there is a curious similarity between the Lur type and some of the old Sumerian carvings. Examples in the Baghdad Museum might easily be taken for a modern Lur. In the old effigies, the thin slightly waved beard of the southern people is distinct from the thick curly Assyrian type, and I was struck by this same quality, a rather flat and quite slight wave in the long beards of the few old Lurs I met (they mostly seem to die young) as compared with other types in Persia. Fifthly, there are the modern carvings in Luristan, on gravestones forty or fifty years old, and well worth looking at. They are done with much spirit, in the old manner, and some of the goats and cows might belong to the very school of the craftsmen of the bronzes. The Lurs draw these, the goats especially, everywhere—on the walls in their houses, the felt rugs they sleep on, etc. On the tombstones they put all the things they care about, figures of men and women, guns, horses, and flocks; on one tombstone near Alishtar I saw, very surprisingly, an elephant. A horse is carved on practically every tombstone. When one looks at this spontaneous art and sees how little it has changed in feeling and technique, one cannot help thinking that the horse cannot have been so very common among the people of the bronzes, or its effigy would have appeared more frequently on the tombs. The fact also that it used to be buried in a grave of its own suggests that it was still a rare and treasured animal. There is an interesting field of study open to any one who will venture through the Saidmarreh jungles to the burial grounds of Tarhan.

After the appearance of Professor Godard's authoritative book on the Luristan bronzes I was in some doubt whether to publish this account of my own journey in that country. I have been induced to do so by the fact that, complete as Professor Godard's investigations were, they were carried out (as far as I can judge in the absence of any maps in his volume) in the very north-west corner of Luristan, not far from Harsin; and as my journey took me farther east and south, I thought that some useful data might be found in the gossip gleaned from tribes unvisited by Europeans since the discovery of the bronzes. The spear-head from Duliskan and the little Greek bronze figure from Sari Kashti, both described above, are new additions to the Luristan finds. I am aware that much of what I heard must be inaccurate, but I have not altered anything to bring it into line with Professor Godard's researches, thinking that, until some one visits that part of the country, it is better to transcribe the reports of the tribesmen as closely as possible.

The only thing to be regretted in Professor Godard's book is the absence of a map. When he speaks of the Dasht-e-Khave he has evidently been misled: Khava is a plain about 12 by 8 miles due south of Nihavand; far from being *sans rivière* it has a good-sized river, the Badavar, running through it which any one travelling there would hardly miss. This river flows into the Gizarud, which in its turn flows into the Saidmarreh. I was there in October before the rains, and found plenty of water. I take it therefore that Professor Godard

did not reach Khava on the east or the Gizarud on the south, but that when he stood on the rolling hills of the Kuh-i-Daud, south of Harsin, which he describes exactly, and asked his guides what the place was called, they waved their hands eastward in the vague Persian way and said, "There is Khava," though as a matter of fact the plain is nearly a day's journey farther east. The fixing of localities is indeed one of the most difficult things in nomad country with no settled villages.

Professor Minorsky has kindly sent me the following comment on the name Dukkan Daud = the Shop of David (p. 499): "There is a more celebrated place of that name south of Saripul. Both are certainly supposed to be David's workshops where he fabricated his famous coats of mail (Quran xxi, 78; xxxiv, 11). The place must certainly be connected with the Ali Ilahi cult."

*[We regret that we have not been able to reproduce for this number the sketch-map which Miss Stark made to illustrate her paper. It is however available for students in the Society's collection, and we hope that it may be reproduced in a later number to accompany a further paper by the author.—Ed. G.ŷ.]*

## THE HABITABILITY OF CHINESE TURKISTAN

LIEUT.-COL. R. C. F. SCHOMBERG, D.S.O.

AT a period when Nature has shown herself so lavish that the world is agluttled with foodstuffs, it may be almost perverse to discuss the possibilities of the empty places of the universe; but population continues to increase, and lean years follow fat ones. These empty places must therefore be a subject of speculation, and it is proposed to consider briefly to what extent the province of Sinkiang, which embraces all Central Asia now in Chinese hands, can support future generations.

Politically this province comprises three geographically distinct regions: 1. The so-called Tarim Basin between the Tien Shan and Kunlun ranges, which is at once the most populous and the oldest inhabited of the three. 2. The plain north of the Tien Shan. 3. The Altai area, between the Great Altai range and the Irtish river. The Ili valley and the Turfan depression are isolated tracts which do not call for separate discussion.

The population of the province consists of nomads and settled cultivators. It is the latter who predominate, and the means of subsistence from agriculture are greater than from pastoral pursuits; and as the Tarim Basin is the most promising part of the province, it is well to consider it first. Agriculture in the Tarim Basin or Kashgaria (a more convenient name) depends wholly on irrigation, and I have nowhere seen south of the Tien Shan, either on the plain or in the hills, a single piece of unirrigated ground under crops. The present population of Sinkiang is between 5 and 6 millions, and that south of the Tien Shan certainly well over 4 millions. Professor Penck's estimate (see *G.ŷ.*, vol. 76, p. 484) requires revision. The estimate as now given is based