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Introduction
For various reasons, Iran kept away these two or three last decades from the international research on Paleolithic undertaken all over the Near and Middle East, Anatolia, the Caucasus or Central Asia. Only since late 1990’s results of new surveys have been published in international scale by Iranian archaeologists. In domains such as first indication of human settlement, the definition of lithic industries or the chronocultural sequences of Early Prehistory (Early and Middle Paleolithic), the origins of Homo sapiens, the extension of Neanderthals or the diffusion of the Hominids towards the Central Asia since the African cradle, Iran is incontestably a key country, composed of a whole of strategic and under-exploited areas since the withdrawal of the Zagros foreign missions (e.g. Smith 1986). Opportunity of investing there, in collaboration with the Iranian archaeologists assumes thus a very particular interest, which it was advisable not to underestimate.

During last two decades, on F. Biglari’s initiative, surveys started again in several geographical units, even of Western Iran: of course in the Kermanshah region (Biglari and Heydari 2001; Shidrang 2004).

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Bisotun massif (Biglari 2001), Islamabad Plain (Biglari and Abdi 1999), Rawansar region (Biglari and Taheri 2001). Paleolithic surveys in the Lorestan, Ilam, Kashan, Gilan, East Azarbaijan and Fars also led to new results (Biglari 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Biglari and Abdi 1999; Biglari et al. 2004; Biglari and Ghafari 2004; Heydari and Ghasidian 2004; Roustaei et al. 2004; Shidrang 2005).

At the same time, international contacts have been or are about to be established with several European research centers or universities:

- Bordeaux 1 University, France, UMR 5199 (Pr. Jacques Jaubert);
- Liège University, Belgium (Pr. Marcel Otte);
- Tübingen University, Germany (Pr. Nicholas Conard);
- Tsukuba University, Japan (Pr. Akira Tsuneki).

It is clear that a notable investment of the scientific international community, and more particularly European, is from now obvious towards Iran. Without falling into the trap of a new “race” to the key areas, this renewed interest coincides on one hand with a certain withdrawal or the stop of several missions in the Near East, and accompanies on the other hand the movement towards exploration of till these last years poorly invested areas for the Paleolithic research: Anatolia (Otte 1995; Slimak et al. 2004), the Caucasus, Georgia with the famous discovery of Dmanisi (e.g. Gabunia et al. 1999) and the reexamination of few aspects of Paleolithic sequence in (e.g. Adler and Tushabramishvili 2004), Armenia (Fourloubey et al. 2003), Northeastern Caucasus (Zenine, unpublished) and now Iran.

The first Iranian-French mission carried out with the University of Bordeaux 1 (Prehistory and Quaternary Geology Institute, UMR 5199-PACEA, France) and Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (ICAR) in September 2004 concretizes the first contacts of spring 2003. As it was a new project with new research field (for French part), we wished to start with reasonable programming in order to grow up in power in the years to come.

Four principal subjects were tackled concerning four regions (fig.1) that we propose to gather in three chronological topics (Lower, Middle and early Upper Paleolithic).

**Lower Paleolithic**

This work concerned the study of lithic series recently discovered by S. Alipour and the members of the mission, on a place named Shiwatoo near Qaziabad in Mahabad area (Azarbaijan-e Gharbi, North-Western Iran). The site is located on old dismantled levels of terrace dominating the Mahabad River and reservoir (fig. 2). We are thus dealing with a lithic industry that will be very difficult to date – even roughly – but which present indisputably Acheulean technotypological indices: unifacial and partial unifacial Discoid flaking (choppers-cores), bipolar on anvil flaking together with productions of large flakes and pebble tools. The main discovery is a typical cleaver made on a side-struck flake of dark volcanic rock, probably andesite (fig. 3). This classical Acheulean tool, well-known in Levant and in Indian subcontinent, is here mentioned for the first time in an intermediate geographical position between these two areas. The newly collected implements and a new analysis of the series led to revise a previous chronocultural attribution to Oldowan (Otte et al. 2004).

With Ganj Par in the Southern Caspian Basin (Biglari 2005; Biglari et al. 2004), and if we do not consider old isolated finds and occurrences like Gakia, Pal Barik, Quri Gol (Braidwood 1960; Mortensen 1993; Sadek-Kooros 1976; Singer and Wymer 1978), it is for the first time that rich Acheulean assemblages
are clearly described for Iran. Shiwatoo corresponds probably to the ‘East Azarbaijan single handaxe find evocated by Singer and Wymer (1978). The completion of breakdowns and analysis (V. Mourre, F. Biglari, J. Jaubert, R. Naderi, S. Alipour) during 2005 will allow us to publish a final report as soon as possible.

**Middle Paleolithic**

The study of the Iranian Middle Paleolithic is taken on the basis of a double objective: 1) to better define the lithic industries and the chronological position of the Zagros Mousterian; 2) to invest other geographical units than Zagros, starting with the Central Plateau (Niyasar).

During last field season, we pursue geological and geomorphological investigation in Kermanshah area (L. Bruxelles) to lay strong foundations for these fields and to supplement previous research on raw materials sources undertaken by S. Heydari and F. Biglari (Biglari 2004c; Heydari 2000, 2004).

Concerning the first point, we excavated last year a perched cave at the base of Bisotun massif (30 km northeast of Kermanshah), Mar Tarik (figs. 4, 5) that was unfortunately in very large part altered by clandestine excavations. This site and two other neighboring caves were surveyed and published by Biglari (Biglari 2001). The karstologic study and the history of its sedimentary dynamics could be drawn (L. Bruxelles). The study of the lithic material (V. Mourre, F. Biglari, J. Jaubert) confirms the techno-typological relationship with previously published data from this area (Hunter’s Cave, Warwasi: e.g. Dibble 1984; Dibble and Holdoway 1993). Even if the former studies were not really technologically oriented, we come across similar elements such as use of close raw materials, Levallois flaking almost exclusive, strong proportion of retouched tools with a majority of points, elongated points, convergent scrapers, *déjetés* or double scrapers with frequently sharpened edges (figs. 6, 7). This industry thus represents a particular economic and functional facies, related most probably on the location and the operating mode of the site itself. A slab of fine grained limestone engraved of geometrical patterns was discovered but unfortunately we can’t be assured that it was associated to Mar Tarik Mousterian (fig. 8). It is the same for some human remains probably of Holocene age and ascribable to *Homo sapiens* on the basis of first diagnosis (B. Maureille, UMR 5199-PACEA). The preliminary study of the faunal assemblage which is mixed and poorly preserved indicates the presence of mammals of small to average size and micro-vertebrates. The micro-vertebrates bones relate to fish, reptiles, and birds remains and most of mammals remains belong to caprines (M. Mashkour, UMR 5197-MNHN). A first date has been obtained by Y. Quinif (CERAK, University of Mons, Belgium) on stalagmite at the base of the sequence: 123, 6 [+3,4/-3,2] kyr BP. A complete program of dating (AMS ^14^C, ESR…) is in hand and we will continue the study of Zagros Mousterian next year by the cleaning up and reexamination with a new excavation at the classical site of the cave of Bisotun/Hunter’s Cave (Coon 1951).

For Niyasar (area of Kashan), the important discovery of Mousterian artifacts in this area of the Central Plateau (Biglari 2004a) has been supplemented in 2004 by a brief study of the sequence, more particularly of the travertine masses with sampling for new U/Th dating (L. Bruxelles).

**Upper Paleolithic**

During this campaign, we made an overview of the main Upper Paleolithic collections kept in the National Museum of Iran. This first study of some Upper Paleolithic assemblages in the Museum
allowed us to conclude to the good representation of the Baradostian in western Zagros. Nevertheless, the assemblages of Yafteh cave, near Khorramabad, appeared without contest as the richest and the best preserved ones (Fig. 9). Thus, our efforts were dedicated to the study of this impressive lithic series, formerly excavated by F. Hole and K. Flannery (Hole and Flannery 1967). The typo-technological study made it possible to describe the principal productions and associated methods:

- Large bladelets (3-7 cm) with straight profile and inverse/alterned retouch (Dufour) or direct bilateral retouch (Arjeneh points, rods). Diagnostic breaks on some of these pieces suggests they were projectile heads;
- Small bladelets (1.5-2.5 cm) with twisted profile and alterned retouch (Dufour sub-type Roc-de-Combe) made from “burins” cores;
- Laminar production dominated by unipolar blanks, often retouched as end scrapers and/or retouched blades, more rarely as burins.

For all of these productions, the knapping technique is the direct soft-hammer percussion.

Thanks to the quality of the old excavations, it was possible to set back all the diagnostic pieces according to their depth. Thus, we could propose that these productions are organized in an archaeological sequence which can be related not only to the closest reference sequences (Warwasi: Olszewski 1999, 2001; Olszewski and Dibble 1994; Shanidar: Solecki 1955), but, in a wider context (Umm el Tlell, Syria: Ploux and Soriano 2003; Ksar-Aqil, Lebanon: Tixier and Inizan 1981), to the industrial development of the Early Upper Paleolithic (EUP) on the whole of the eastern and northern Mediterranean circumference: large and straight bladelets at the base, small and twisted bladelets at the top. This work confirms and precise the information given by Hole and Flannery (1967) and Olszewski (2001). This sequence should be clarified by new planned excavations, and completed by the study of the rest of the assemblage (tools on blade). This study, undertaken by J.-G. Bordes and S. Shidrang, will be continued next year with, as far as possible, a stay in Philadelphia to study the material from Warwasi which is preserved there.

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Fig. 1. Map of Iran showing the location of the sites under research by Iranian-French mission
(Graphic: F. Biglari)

Fig. 2. A general view of Shiwatoo, arrows showing the location of the lithic scatter
(Photo: F. Biglari 2004)

Fig. 3. Acheulian artifacts from Shiwatoo, Mahabad region (Drawing: J. Jaubert)
Fig. 4. Mar Tarik cave, the arrow shows location of the cave mouth (Photo: M. Rahmati 2004)

Fig. 5. Mar Tarik, general map and longitudinal profile of the cavity
(Topography: J.-G. Bordes, J. Jaubert, R. Naderi, V. Mourre; Cad: V. Mourre)
Fig. 6. Selected Mousterian artifacts from Mar Tarik cave (Drawing: J. Jaubert, S. Shidrang)

Fig. 7. Selected Mousterian artifacts from Mar Tarik cave (Drawing: J. Jaubert, S. Shidrang)
Fig. 8. Limestone plaque with engravings from Mar Tarik cave (Photo: J.-G. Bordes, F. Biglari)

Fig. 9. Selected Upper Paleolithic artifacts from Yafteh cave (Drawing: S. Shidrang)