

Discovery of new open-air Paleolithic localities in Central Alborz, Northern Iran

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Abstract

The cooperative French-Iranian Paleoanthropological Project (FIPP) discovered three Paleolithic localities in Central Alborz, Northern Iran during its 2005 field mission. In the northern foothills near Baliran in Mazandârân province, Garm Roud yielded an open-air site with an archaeological layer attributable to the last glacial period that dates from the end of OIS 3 ($28,486 \pm 190$ cal BP). These geochronological data and the typo-technical observations converge to place the Garm Roud 2 assemblage in the Upper Paleolithic. Garm Roud 2 is thus the first site of this kind discovered in the area. In the southern foothills near Damâvand in Tehran province, Moghanak and Otchounak represent two open-air surface localities with lithic assemblages of Mousterian to Ante-Mousterian affinity. Garm Roud, Moghanak, and Otchounak provide some of the first direct field evidence of early human settlements in this central area of the Middle East.

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Introduction

The foothills of the Alborz chain and the southern shore of the Caspian Sea in Northern Iran are potentially important but little known for any pattern of Early to Late Pleistocene human settlements and cultural evolution in Eurasia (Bar-Yosef

and Belfer-Cohen, 2001; Mithen and Reed, 2002; Dennell, 2003; Antón and Swisher, 2004; Brantingham et al., 2004; Otte and Kozłowski, 2004; Dennell and Roebroeks, 2005; Shea, 2006). This possible human migratory path spans between the Zagros and the Caucasus to the west and Central Asia to the east, both of which have yielded a great deal of Paleolithic evidence (e.g., Smith, 1986; Dani and Masson, 1992; Otte, 1998; Davis and Ranov, 1999; Golovanova and Doronichev, 2003; Brantingham et al., 2004; Roustaei et al., 2004) (Fig. 1a). However, this central location contrasts with the sparseness of field discoveries and absence of a chronostratigraphic framework for the area. Where Paleolithic cultures are concerned, Northern Iranian evidence consists of rare

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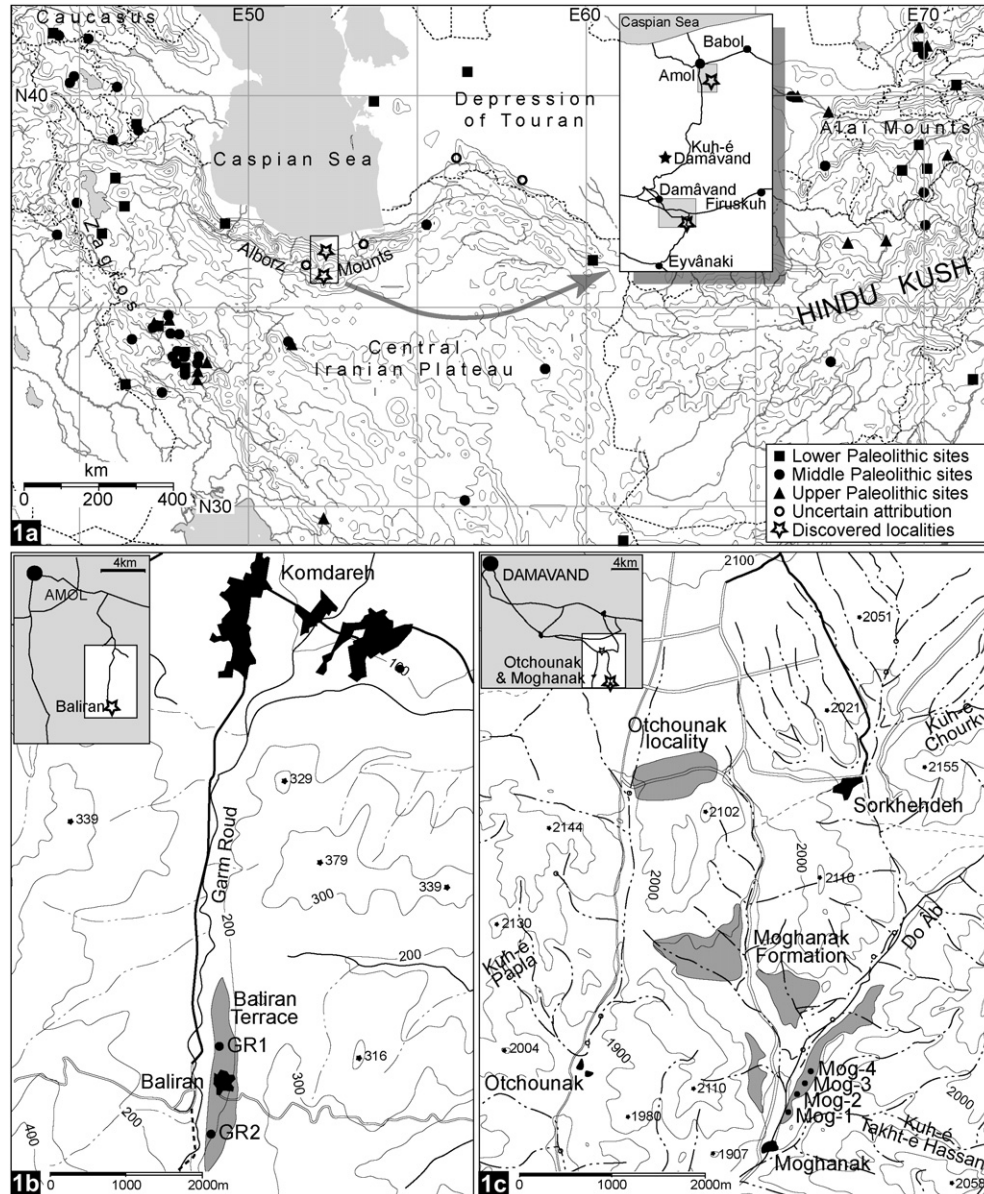


Fig. 1. Location of the Garm Roud, Otchounak and Moghanak sites in the context of Middle Eastern, Caucasian and Central Asian Paleolithics. 1a: Distribution of Paleolithic sites in the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia and survey area (see text for references). 1b: Location map of the Baliran Terrace (in grey) and Garm Roud archaeological sites; abbreviations: GR1 (Garm Roud 1), GR2 (Garm Roud 2). 1c: Location map of the Moghanak formation and the Otchounak locality (in grey); abbreviations: Mog-1 (Moghanak 1), Mog-2 (Moghanak 2), Mog-3 (Moghanak 3) and Mog-4 (Moghanak 4).

and sporadic surface finds (de Morgan, 1896; Keraudren and Thibault, 1973). It is only recently that a probable Lower Paleolithic assemblage has been discovered on the surface in the Rostamabad plain in Gilân province (Biglari et al., 2004). No human remains have been discovered in the area to date. Where chronostratigraphy is concerned, no framework exists for the area—the closest available sequence is the Middle and Upper Paleolithic Yafteh sequence in the Zagros (Hole and Flannery, 1967; Otte et al., 2007).

An investigation in the Central Alborz by the cooperative French-Iranian Paleoanthropological Project (FIPP) (led by G.B. and A.A.K.) is addressing this situation by means of a systematic and multidisciplinary survey of the Quaternary deposits surrounding the cities of Amol and Pelour in Mazandârân

province and Damâvand in Tehran province (Fig. 1a). During the 2005 field mission, the FIPP discovered three Paleolithic localities which we report on here: the Garm Roud locality (Baliran, Mazandârân province) yielded an open-air site with Upper Paleolithic affinities in a good stratigraphic context that provides the first available dates for the area. Moghanak and Otchounak (Damâvand, Tehran province) are two open-air surface localities with Mousterian to Ante-Mousterian affinities.

Description and discoveries in the Garm Roud locality (Baliran, Mazandârân province)

The Quaternary formation at Baliran is located in the northern foothills of the Alborz chain, 20 km south of the Caspian

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