

## **Preface**

The beginning of a new era, which allows the overcoming of obsolete approaches and, in the same way, the sterilization of 'Europocentric' concepts, in which the bi-laterality of choices can take place within a guideline to be dictated by the host country, owner of the archaeological and artistic heritage, seems today an inescapable step towards the creation of new paradigms that must overcome neo-colonial approaches, mostly camouflaged, certainly less visible than in the recent past, but persistent.

The conviction, since ever, that every single bilateral project has its strength in overcoming the asymmetric relations that are defined within several research groups of dissimilar origin, represents the priority base from which to start in the development of a multidisciplinary research project that has a strong international vocation.

On the basis of what has been written and what has been done in Iran since 1993, the request I received to work on the field in one of the most important sites of the Middle East represented an indispensable opportunity that, however, had to be recognized, as for my collaborators, in a container of ideas that defined solid theoretical bases, in which the 'recognition' of the host country and its cultural policy was not a mere rhetorical exercise but a metabolized action, unconsciously acquired, without baroque redundancies.

In order to activate a project of this kind, with the theoretical basis just described, without any derogation, I have contracted debts of gratitude with many people and institutions, who have played a fundamental role in the implementation and development of our research, to which I would like to express my deepest thanks.

First of all I have to thank the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism (= RICHT), Dr. S.M. Beheshti and Dr. J. Golshan for their total harmony with our scientific proposals and support to the project started in 2016, and their Offices, well represented by Dr. M. Kholghi and her colleagues Dr. S. Kiani and Dr. M. Ilkhani who, even in the critical issues, have always been able to find solutions that would allow the development of our research ideas. Likewise, I have to remember Dr. H. Choubak, former Director of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (= ICAR) until 2018, who played an essential role in the success of the project, and the current Director, Dr. R. Shirazi, who showed the same sensitivity to the commitments made to Shahr-i Sokhta in these early years of research.

On the Italian front, I must extend my due thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (= MAECI) for its active contribution to our project, immediately considered a priority in the perspective of bilateral relations between the two countries (Italy and Iran), relations historically determined by the choice of paths of sharing and collaboration. In this perspective, I would like to thank the ambassadors of our country who have followed one another in Iran since 2016, Excellence M. Conciatori and Excellence G. Perrone, and the Cultural Attachés of the Embassy of the last few years, Prof. C. Cereti and Dr. V. Russo Spena, who have always followed our work with interest, promoting it both in Italy and in Iran, allowing us to convey our results within a wider basin of events.

With no less emphasis, I would like to thank the University of Salento, its Dean, Prof. Fabio Pollice, and the Department of Cultural Heritage, in particular Prof. F. Baffi, a key driver for the start of the project, and the Directors of the Department of Cultural Heritage, Prof. Raffaele Casciaro and Prof. G. Tagliamonte, who shared and shares not only work strategies but also ideas of

wider value in a framework oriented towards scientific productivity and sharing common experiences with the Iranian mission of Mansur Sajjadi.

This is the appropriate place to thank all those who develop their research at Shahr-i Sokhta, professors who represent the core of the MAIPS (Prof. G. Ceraudo, Prof. P.F. Fabbri, Prof. Fiorentino, Prof. C. Minniti), those who have contributed to the volume with their own writing (Dr. S. Festuccia, Dr. A. Potenza), those who helped me in the realization of the volume, Dr. V. Cardini, G.A. Minaya, and Dr. R. Rivoltella without which the publication's release times would have expanded worryingly. In these thanks I would also like to thank Dr. A. Leone for having participated in the first two excavation campaigns which are the subject of this volume.

Finally, I would like to thank the organizations and private people who have funded and are, in different and different ways, subsidizing our project, supporting what MAECI, Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Salento and University of Goettingen have so far allowed to do. In particular, I owe my gratitude to Dr. G. Mancuso, for his willingness and passion put at the service of our excavations in Shahr-i Sokhta, and to the CEFLA company, immediately interested in what we have done and what we will do in the major center of Sistan.

A thought is due to all the members of the Iranian mission directed by Mansur Sajjadi who have never made us feel the hardships of our long stays in such distant regions; to Dr. H. Moradi, Prof. H. Sarhaddi Daddian, Dr. S. Parsaiian, Dr. M. Rahmani, Dr. R. Zarruri, Dr. J. Marhashi and Dr. S. Amini, I want to express all my gratitude for the many days spent together, days spent with the conviction that we were always in the place where we wanted to be.

As is often the case, lastly we would like to thank those who first made possible these years of work in Shahr-i Sokhta; I would like to thank Mansur Sajjadi for his hospitality within the Iranian mission, for sharing the scientific results he collected between 1997 and 2015 and for making possible the realization of an idea, first only conceived, finally realized.

**Enrico Ascalone**

Excavations at Tel Iblis, Bampur, Yahya, Shahdad, Shahr-i Sokhta and, in more recent years, Konar Sandal has shown the importance of southeastern region of Iran in the archaeological investigations dating to the third millennium BC.

Now more than 20 years have passed since the beginning of the second cycle of excavations at Shahr-i Sokhta. Scholars familiar with Sistani research, are well aware with the background of archaeological studies in this region and I do not think it is necessary to repeat in this regard.

In 1997, the second cycle of excavations at Shahr-i Sokhta began and still goes on. In addition to extensive excavations in the graveyard, that have led to the discovery of more than 900 new tombs from different periods, excavations in the Residential Area, especially in the Central Quarter, have led to new discoveries, including a better understanding of the site during last phases of period III and first phases of period IV. On the basis of these last investigation is now clear that the site was still quite large during these last phases of occupation.

In 2016, with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between RICCHT and University of Salento leaded by Enrico Ascalone, a new page was opened in the research of Shahr-i Sokhta. Iranian Archaeological Expedition has proposed to start a series of collaborations, especially in the field of interdisciplinary research and using the experiences and facilities of Italian colleagues in the field of such research. The history of cooperation in archaeological field group dates back to the 1960's when Italian scholars were active in Sistan and the results of their research were very effective in clarifying the history and culture of Sistan. On these bases, here I must mention the role of Umberto Scerrato and Maurizio Tosi which led to in the past the Italian archaeological research in Sistan.

At the end, I would like to take opportunity to express my gratitude to Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti and Jalil Golshan, the former heads of the RICCHT and their collaborators for their continuous support of Expedition. My personal thanks goes also to the main members of expedition, who have performed their duties in the best possible way during the long years of research and excavations: Rajab Mohammad Zaruri, Hossein Moradi, Hossein Sarhaddi Dadian, Saeed Parsaian,

Media Rahmani, Sare Amini, Zahra Sepiani, Zahra Rajabiyun and M.R. Miri head of Pishinpazhuh Cultural Institute, and our local workers for their kind collaborations during past years.

**Seyyed Mansur Seyyed Sajjadi**

