Sar-o-Tar

The sand dune covered landscape east of the Helmand Valley, abandoned since the 15th century CE, most clearly shows the agricultural system. Occupied only sporadically, the Parthian period carried the largest population, based upon the number of archaeological sites identified.

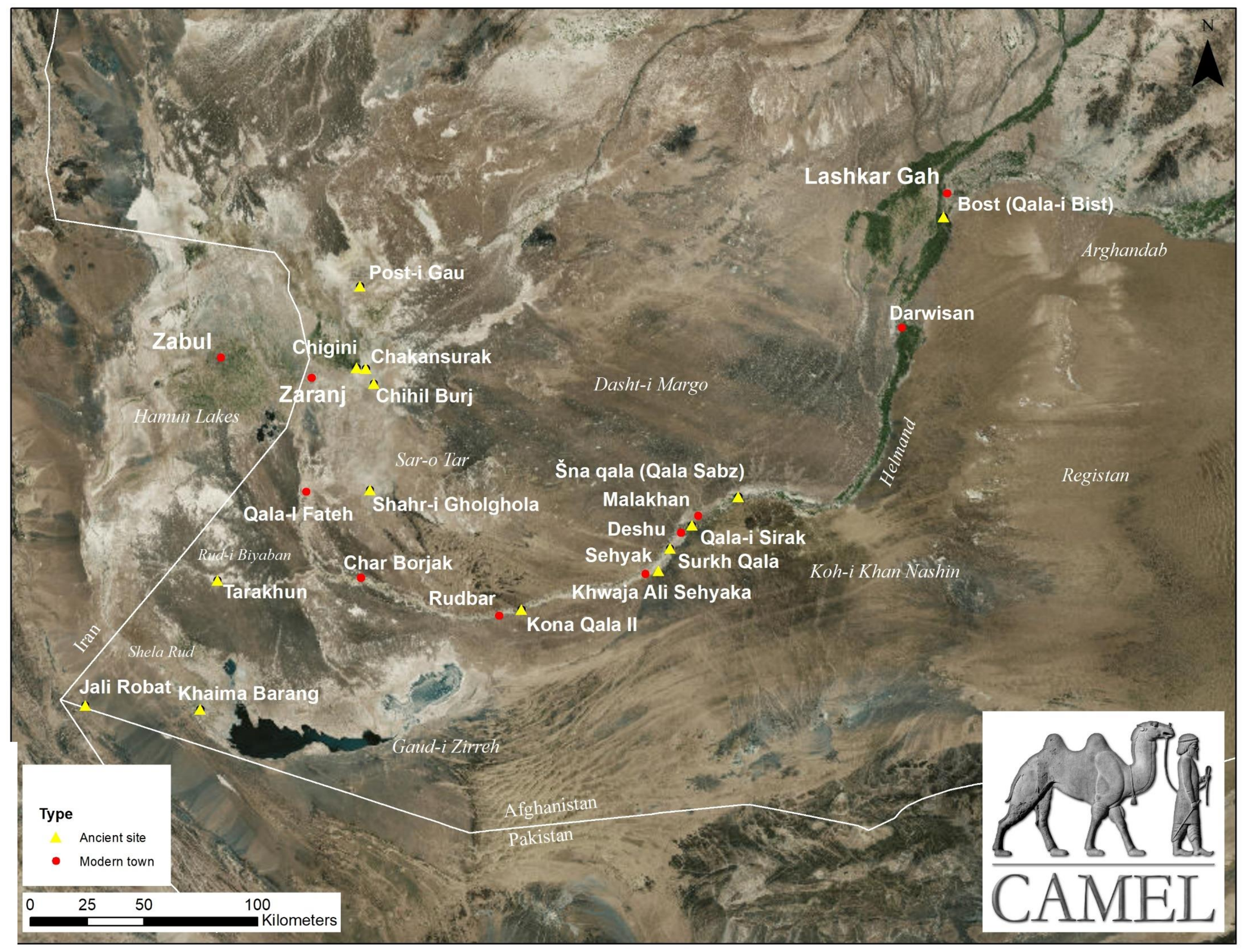
Parthian-era Agriculture in Sistan, Afghanistan

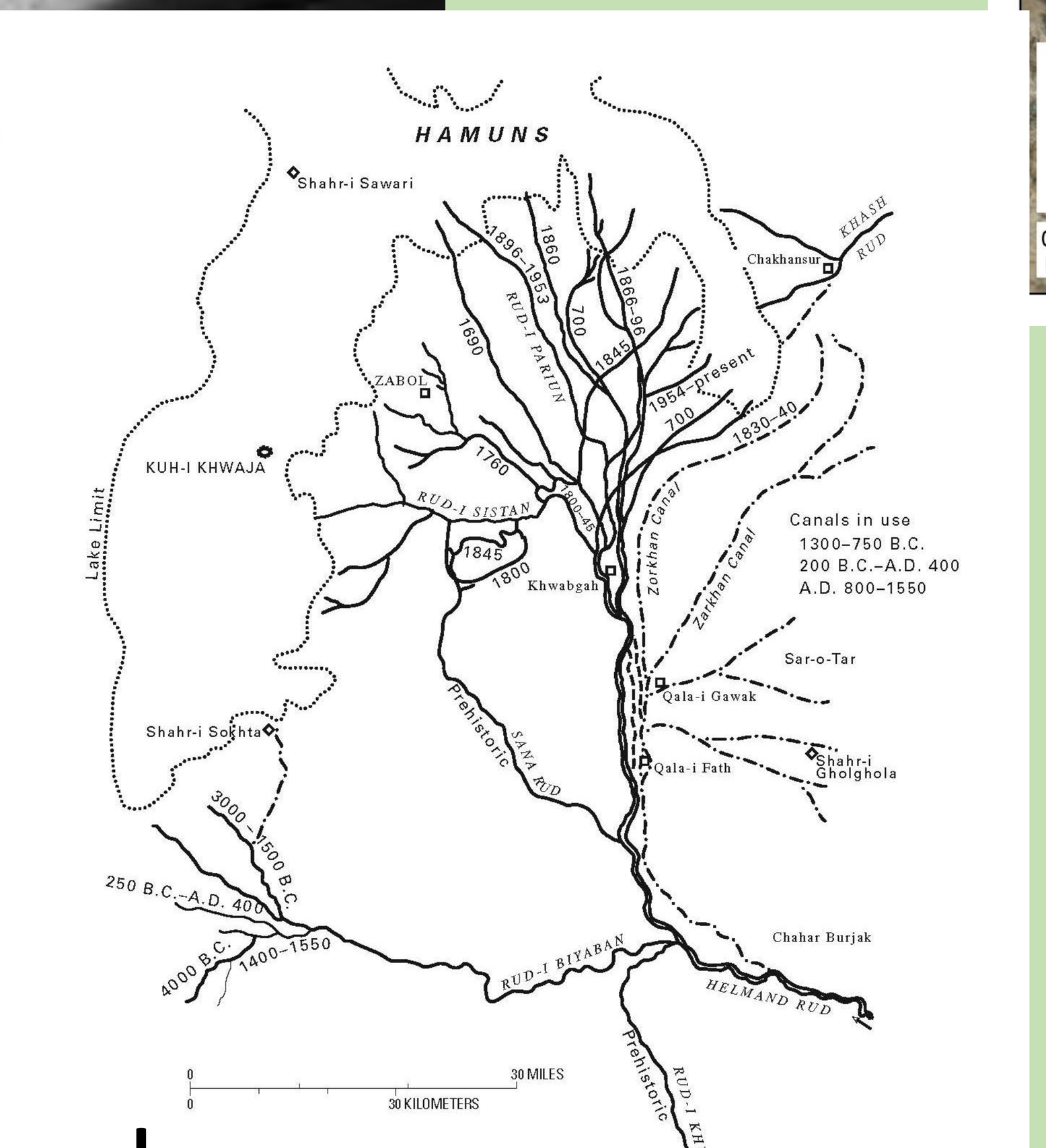
200 BCE-225 CE

Mitchell Allen
and *William B. Trousdale*

Sistan

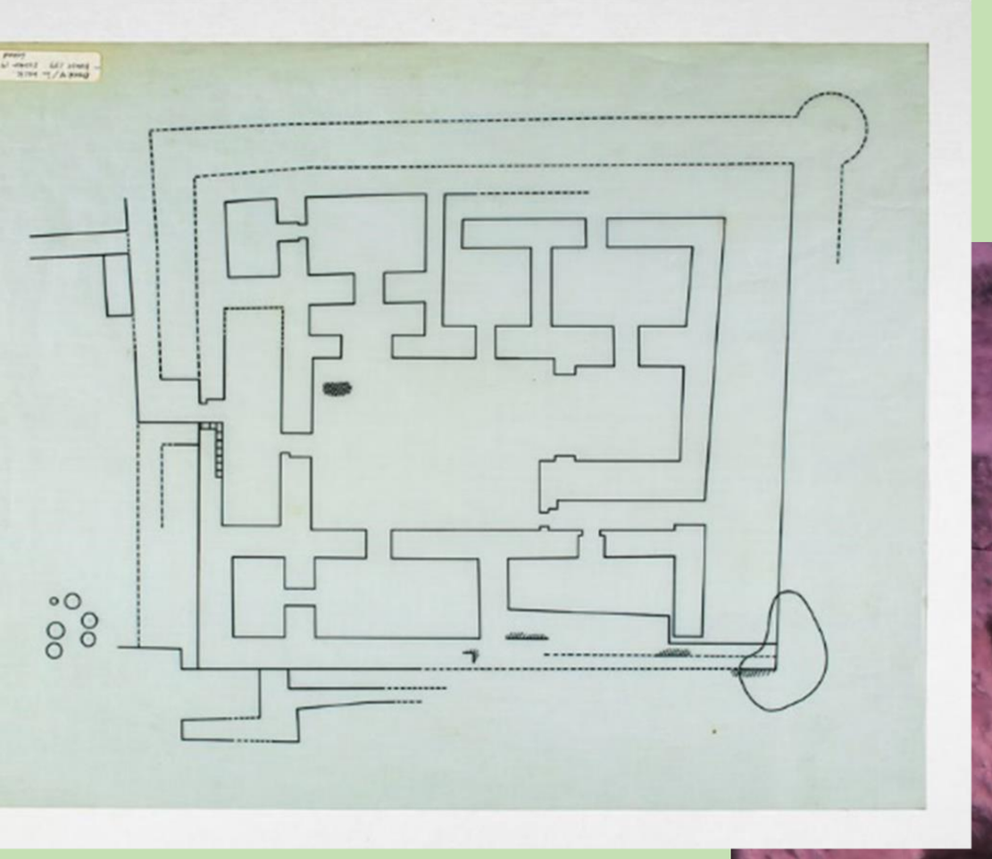
Southwest corner of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan and Iran

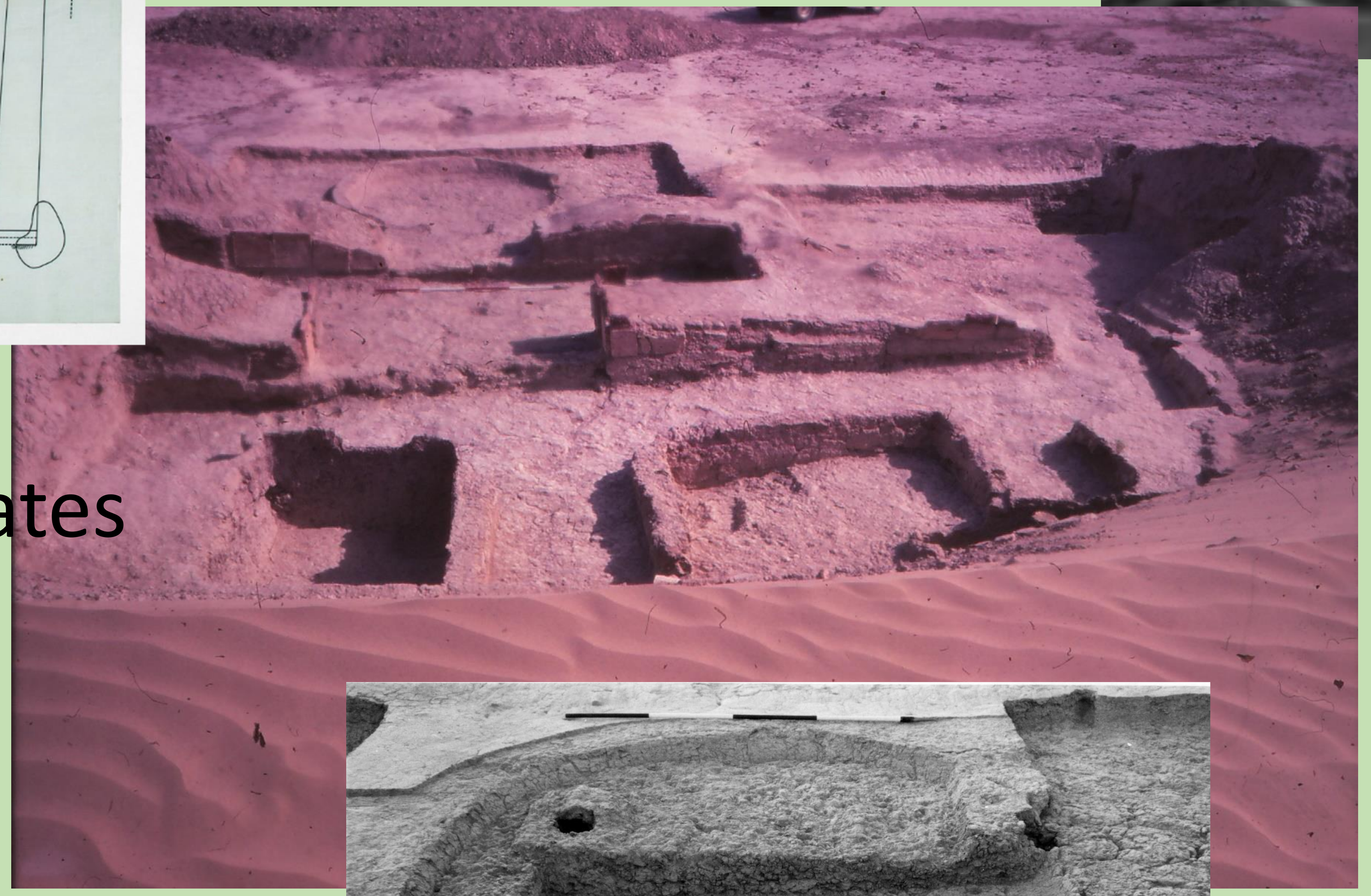




Canals

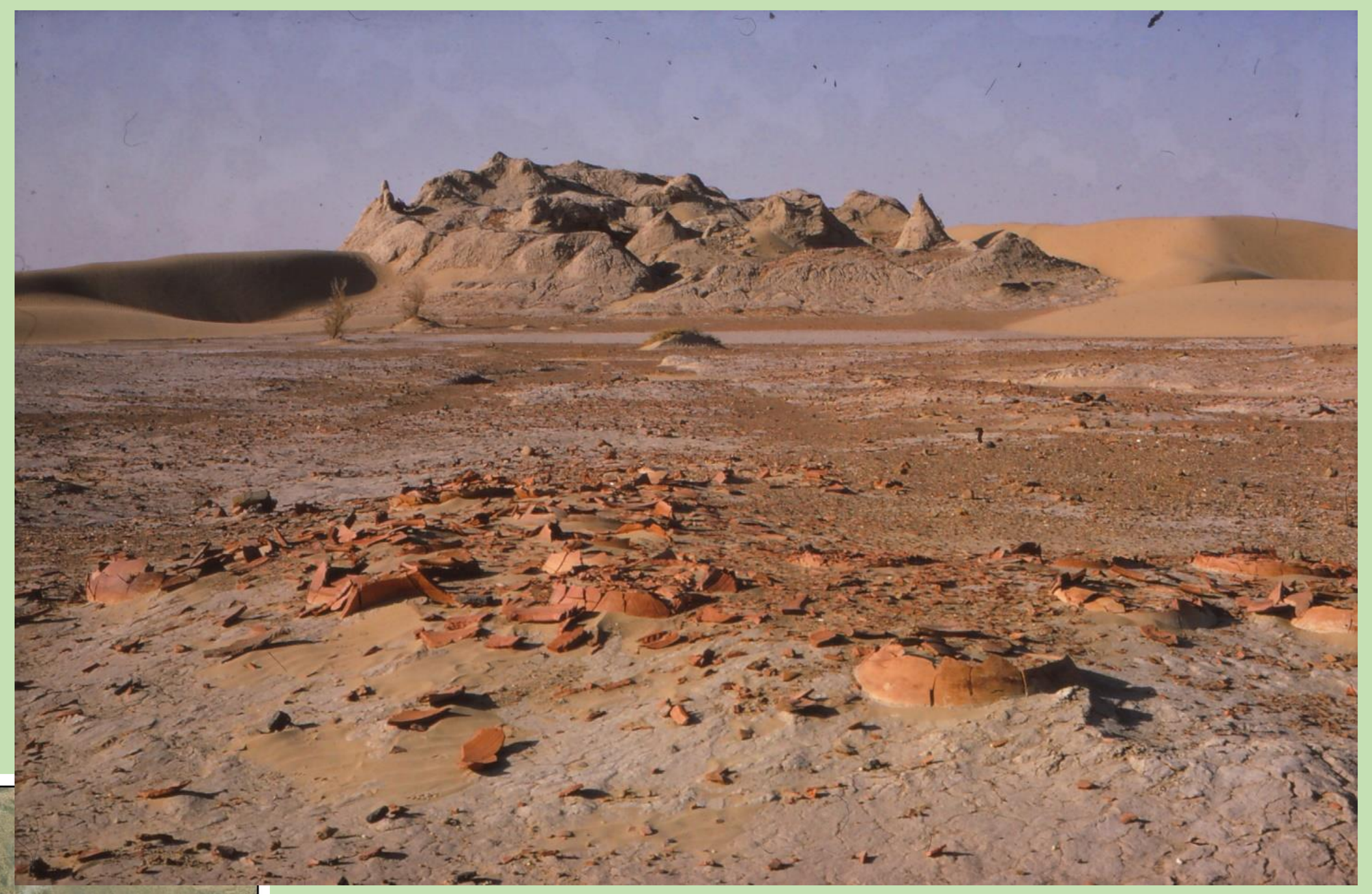
Large canals from the Helmand River as much as 100 km in length irrigated Sar-o-Tar farmland, many still visible on the uninhabited landscape. Settlement pattern of the Parthian era follows that of canals, suggesting they were built in this era and redug in later times. Smaller canals led from the major ones to irrigate fields. In modern times, similar canal systems are used for agriculture.



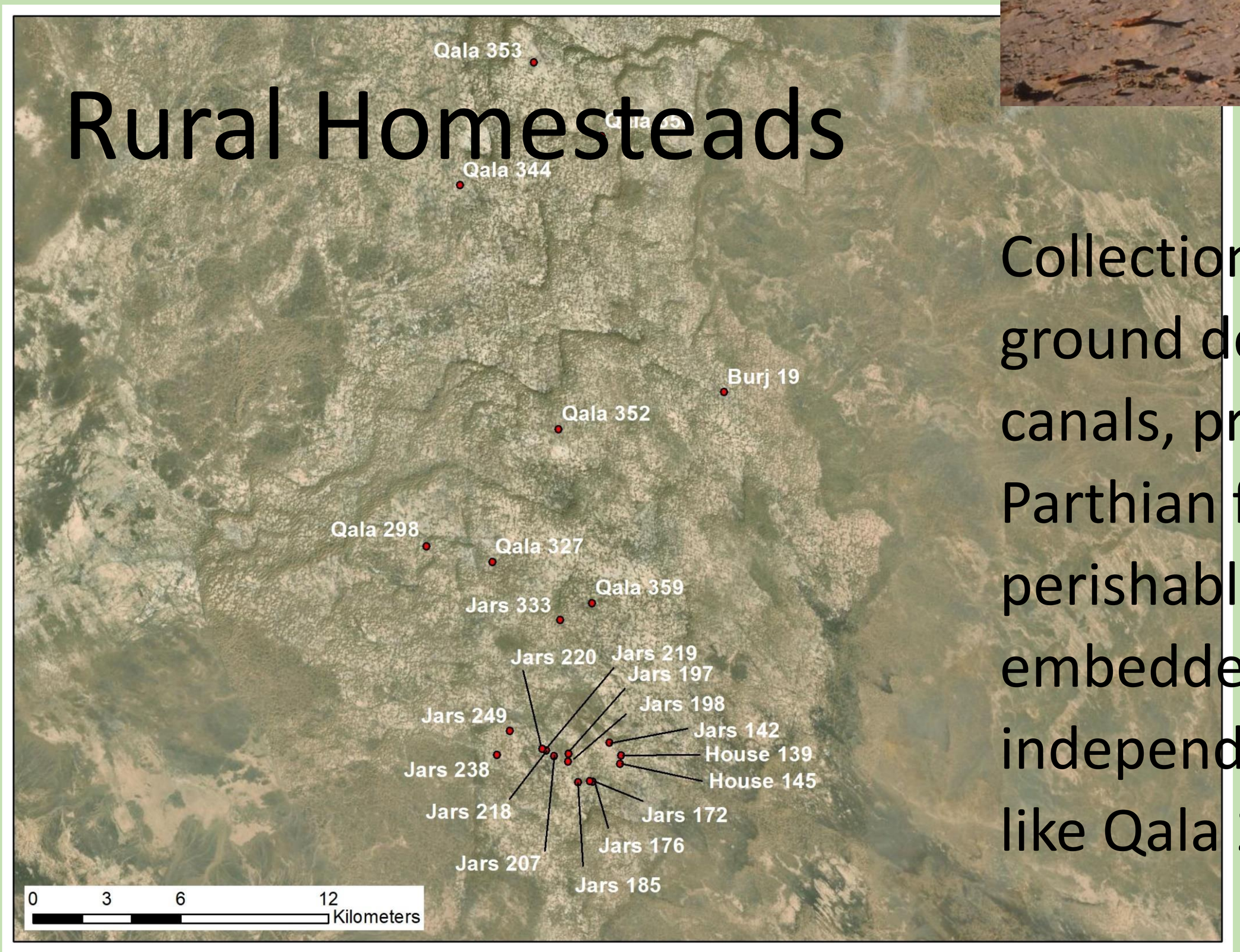


Elite Estates

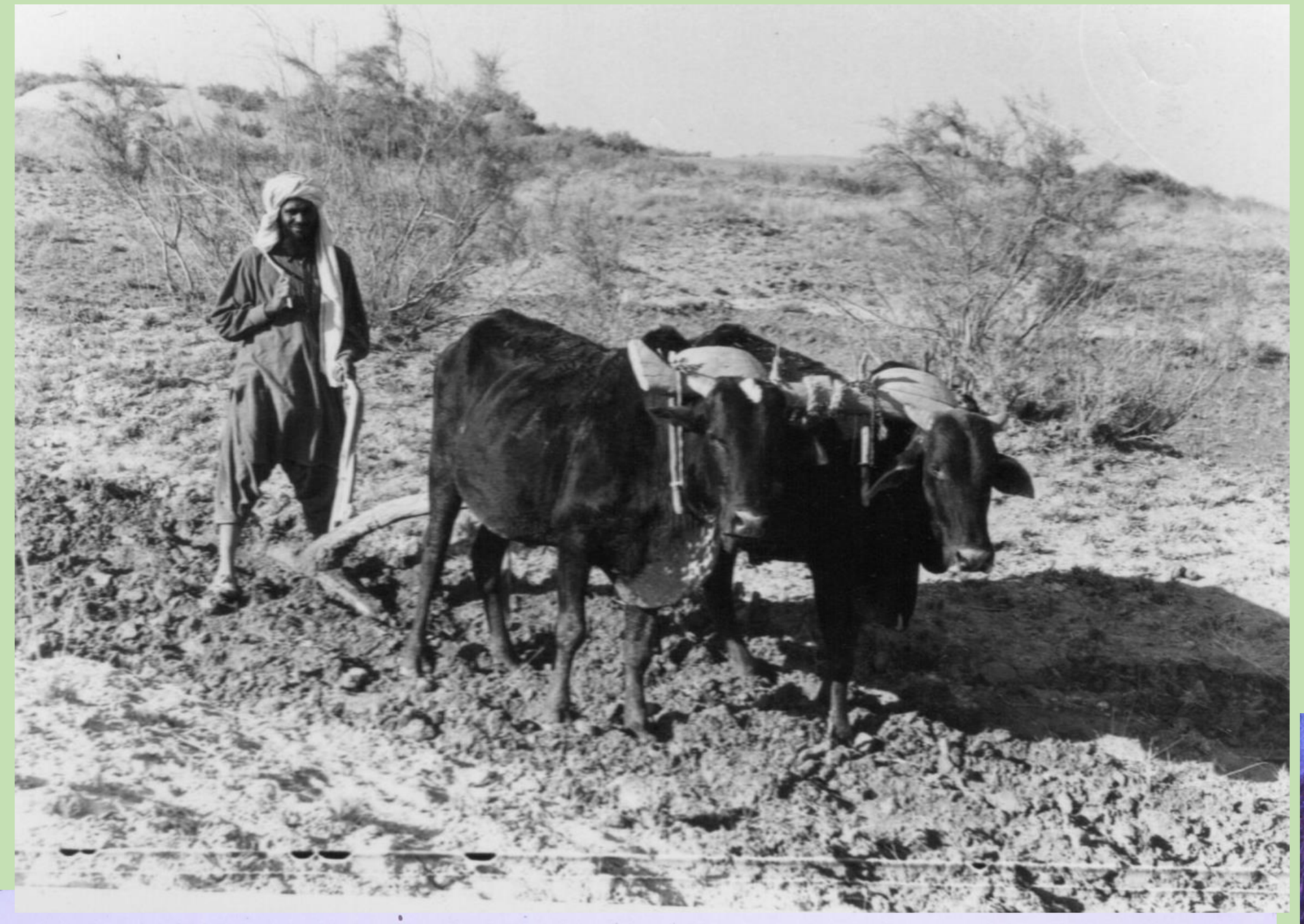
Several large Parthian domestic estates from the 1st C BCE/CE were identified in the survey. House 139 was excavated in 1974, showing local industrial features as well as a substantial domestic sections. Some large fortified sites surveyed nearby also had Parthian material remains.



Rural Homesteads



Collections of large store jars embedded in the ground dotted the landscape along smaller canals, probably the sole remaining features of Parthian farmsteads. Houses were likely built of perishable materials so all that remains are the embedded jars. While many jars sites stood independently, some were near large fortresses, like Qala 231 shown here.



Modern Sistani parallels

The vast differentiation between large estates and small farmsteads is also a feature of modern life along the Helmand. Agriculture technology has not improved much either. Ethnographic work done by Ghulam Rahman Amiri as part of our project demonstrates that the farmers retained less than 10% of their harvest,sharing the rest with the village khans, craftspeople, mosques, and government

References/ Acknowledgements

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References (details on handout): Amiri 2020, Trousdale and Allen 2022, Whitney 2006