

THE IRON AGE PERIOD AT THE SARAND NECROPOLIS IN NORTHWESTERN IRAN

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Abstract: The northwestern region of Iran has an important place in the archaeological studies of the Iron Age of Iran, eastern Turkey and the southern Caucasus. In this geographic zone, several Iron Age necropolises have been investigated until the present moment, one of the most important of them being the Sarand necropolis. The archaeological excavations here led to the discovery of 36 tombs belonging to the Iron Age. The graves in this cemetery are rectangular stone chambers with single or multiple burials. In some of them, secondary and disturbed graves are also present. The burial status in association with the gender of the dead shows great variability and often there is direct correlation between the biological sex of the individual and the grave goods. Our study focuses on one of the graves of this rich cemetery following a descriptive-analytical approach by comparison to other key sites of the Iron Age of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The results of this study indicate a cultural similarity between this particular necropolis and other Iron Age cemeteries in Iran and Azerbaijan.

Cuvinte-cheie: Nord-Vestul Iranului, necropola de la Sarand, Epoca fierului, continuitate culturală

Rezumat: Nord-vestul Iranului deține un rol important în ceea ce privește studiile dedicate epocii fierului cu referire la Iran, estul Turciei și sudul Caucazului. Până în prezent în această zonă au fost investigate mai multe necropole aparținând epocii fierului, una dintre cele mai importante fiind cea de la Sarand. Cercetările arheologice de aici au dus la identificarea a 36 de structuri funerare atribuite epocii fierului – camere mortuare din piatră conținând morminte individuale sau multiple, iar uneori și morminte secundare sau deranjate. Statusul funerar în asociere cu genul individului indică o mare variabilitate și deseori o corelație directă între sexul biologic și inventarului funerar. Studiul nostru se concentrează asupra unuia dintre cele mai bogate morminte din necropolă. Printr-o abordare descriptiv-analitică se realizează paralele cu alte situri cheie de epoca fierului din Iran și Republica Azerbaidjan. Rezultatele studiului indică existența de analogii culturale între această necropolă și alte cimitire de epoca fierului din Iran și Azerbaidjan.

INTRODUCTION

Northwestern Iran, given its strategic geographical location, has embraced various human cultures in the past and has played an important role in the development of the cultures of the Near East (Irvani, Mamalizadeh Giglu 2013, p. 34). The Iron Age culture was prevalent in this region and in many other areas outside Iran.

An important part of the Iron Age data in northwestern Iran came from archaeological excavations, especially from historical cemetery excavations such as Hasanlu V–IV (Danti 2013), Dinkhah II–III (Muscarella 1968), Haftavan IV–V (Burney 1972), Masjide Kabud (Hajabari Nobari 2004), Khoda Afarin (Irvani 2010) and Ghizil Ghaheh (Hajizadeh 2014). The data on burials and their associated rituals published in the archaeological literature also provide valuable information on the immaterial aspects of the prehistoric cultures (Talaie 1991, p. 174).

In the fall of 2018, the remains of several graves were investigated during the road construction operations at the Sungun copper mine in eastern Iranian Azerbaijan. The

first season of excavation of this cemetery began under the direction of Hossein Esmaili Atiq, which resulted in ca. 36 tombs excavated and scientifically documented. This necropolis is one of the richest dated to the Iron Age (I–II) of northwestern Iran, specifically in terms of the diversity of burials. The archaeological study of the Sarand necropolis is important, as the funerary finds in this area indicate a cultural affiliation between this particular cemetery and other Iron Age necropolises. It is also important to place the cemetery in the sphere of influence of the Urartu culture and the material finds of this period. Therefore, the study of the obtained data from the Sarand necropolis provides important information on the Iron Age period of this wider area.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Iron Age archaeological studies of northwestern Iran mainly rely on the archaeological excavations of Lake Urmia surroundings such as Goy Tepe (Burton 1951),