

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut
EURASIEN-ABTEILUNG
AUSSENSTELLE TEHERAN



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**Water and caves in ancient Iranian religion:
aspects of archaeology,
cultural history and religion**

ARCHÄOLOGISCHE MITTEILUNGEN AUS IRAN UND TURAN
Sonderdruck aus Band 43, 2011

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Water and caves in ancient Iranian religion: aspects of archaeology, cultural history and religion

Preface

By N. Bagherpour Kashani and Th. Stöllner

In the year 2001, a surprising discovery was made in a copper mine in the district of Vešnave, situated in the Iranian western Central Plateau. The mine, named Čale Ğār 1, was used in prehistoric times for the exploitation of copper. However, the findings that were made first in 2001 subsequently led to a research project that was generously supported by the German Research foundation (DFG) and by various other institutions between 2001 and 2005. Much support came from Iranian institutions, especially the ICHTO, the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation. Thankfully we keep in mind the former Vice-Minister Seyed Mohammad Beheshti, Dr. Abdolrasool Vatandoust (RCCCR) and the former director of the Iranian Research Center of Archaeological Research (ICAR), Dr. Massoud Azarnoush. Additionally, the co-directors of the dig, Dr. M. Mireskanderi and Mr. Kouros Roustaei (both ICAR) were important and indispensable partners.¹ The project was carried out within the joint project: Early Mining and Metallurgy in West Central Iran, that was directed by the DAI and the ICAR. Much help was provided by the DAI in Teheran, namely Margrit Hakimpour and PD Dr. Barbara Helwing. The Iranian-German joint excavations revealed a place where obviously ritual activities had been carried out in water that was continuously present in the mine as a small lake. Thousands of ceramics, jewellery artefacts and other small finds were uncovered by the archaeologists up to 2004. In the last campaign in a second mine, Čale Ğār 2, similar findings as in mine 1 were uncovered in a small humid corner.

The objects were deposited in the water in certain manners and it seems that the mines were used as a holy place over a long period – from 800 B.C. until the 8th century A.D. This discovery was of great interest, both for scientists of history of religions and for archaeologists who engage in Near Eastern archaeology. Soon after the discovery, a large debate developed between archaeologists and Iranologists, such as Mary Boyce, Ludwig Paul and Philip Kreyenbroek. While the archaeologists generally debated the character of the offerings – such as the female character of the jewellery or the

taphonomy and chronology of the offering layers –, Iranologists put more emphasis on the question whether the site could be related to a special offering ritual related to the ‘waters’ or generally with a goddess like Ānāhītā. During this debate, different opinions and a certain variation in interpreting the sites became apparent.

To discuss the discovery of Vešnave and its meaning, in the year 2008 the workshop “Water and Caves in Ancient Iranian Religion. Aspects of Archaeology, Cultural History and Religion” was organised by Thomas Stöllner and Natascha Bagherpour Kashani on July 3rd and the 4th, in the “Kunst-sammlungen” at the University of Bochum along with the exhibition “Streifzüge durch Persien. 5500 Jahre Geschichte in Ton”.² Ten scholars from Germany, Belgium, the UK and the USA met to debate the finds from Čale Ğār 1 and 2: Philip Kreyenbroek, Jennifer Rose and Jan Snoek, who considered the religious aspects of the site and Dietrich Huff, Bruno Overlaet, Ernie Haerinck, St. John Simpson, Thomas Stöllner, Aydin Abar and Natascha Bagherpour, who discussed the archaeological aspects. We were able to collect almost all of the lectures, and the results of the discussions are published here.

The finds of Vešnave are discussed in three sections: First, the articles by Th. Stöllner, A. Abar and N. Bagherpour provide a description and first insights into the interpretation of the site and its finds.³ In a second part, Vešnave is compared to other archaeological sites and features by D. Huff and B. Overlaet. The third part on history of religion is discussed by Ph. Kreyenbroek and J. Rose.

The first article by Thomas Stöllner introduces the site. He describes the location and outlines first thoughts on the meaning of the site. Female worshipping is put in a wider context according to the archaeological phenomenology, and comparable cases are collected and discussed to explain the variety of similar cult practises. Such examples only lead to some general analogies but do not explain the ritual progression and the motives of the devotees. In his article he includes the results of the ar-

¹ For an extensive report see: Stöllner *et al.* 2011.

² Catalogue of the exhibition: Stöllner 2008.

³ The excavation report will present the finds and the analyses in detail (Stöllner/Bagherpour/Abar forthcoming).

chaeobotanical and archaeozoological examinations by Rainer Pasternak and Monica Doll.

Aydin Abar has studied the ceramics from Vešnavē and presents a first overview on his findings. He provides a chronological ordering of the ceramics and theoretical considerations on the ritual practice at Vešnavē.

The jewellery is treated by Natascha Bagherpour, who introduces some find categories like gold-in-glass beads, etched cornelian beads and finger rings.

Problems of votive offerings are highlighted by Dietrich Huff, who discusses the meaning of hoards of objects, for example from Taḳt-e Solaimān and in the palace of Ardešīr Pāpakān. Comparisons are offered to prove the practice of antique religious offerings.

Bruno Overlaet treats archaeological sites in Lorestān. Based on this comparison, he considers Vešnavē as a *favissa* that could have been related to a rain making cult.

Philip Kreyenbroek and Jennifer Rose discuss Vešnavē from a history of religion point of view. Ph. Kreyenbroek analyses the evidence of the Zoroastrian script, the *Nērangestān*, about the cult of water in Zoroastrianism, and compares Vešnavē to other water and cult places.

J. Rose explores the continuity of ritual offerings to water in Zoroastrianism. from the Persian period to the present.

J. Snoek, who joined the workshop and enriched the discussions, provides a summary and a comment on the considerations proposed during the workshop. His personal view has changed from a doubtful scepticism in the beginning to a finally restrained but consenting perspective that accepts

the offering character and its ritual importance. His contribution shows furthermore how much the social sciences depend on the inter-cultural and trans-disciplinary dialogue to reach to a fruitful consensus.

The editors Th. Stöllner and N. Bagherpour would like to thank all attendees for revealing their contributions.⁴ Furthermore, we want to thank the “Kunstsammlungen” and Prof. Dr. Weber-Lehmann for her and her collaborators’ support, especially Mr. Behnen, who housed us during the weekend. The workshop would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Käte Hamburger College “Dynamics in the History of Religions”, notably Prof. Dr. Volkhard Krech and Dr. Marion Steinicke for their engaged administrative and scientific support. This enabled us to invite various colleagues to Bochum. Several members of the college also have attended the lectures and contributed to the discussions.

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⁴ For the help with the translation of several abstracts into Farsi we would like to thank Hamid Fahimi, Kianoosh Rezanian and Leila Amudadashi.

Čāle Ğār (Kāšān Area) and votives, *favissae* and cave deposits in pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions

By Bruno Overlaet

Keywords: Iron Age, Iran/Lorestān, rain-making cult, *favissae*

The Čāle Ğār “mine-cave” finds raise many questions about the why, when and how these offerings were placed in the different parts of the two caves. The permanent presence of water in the caves strongly suggests that the offerings of items such as jewellery, coins, pottery and foodstuffs, must somehow be linked to either a water cult or to a divinity that is associated with water and/or caves. Philip Kreyenbroek and Jenny Rose demonstrate in this volume the importance of water related rituals in Zoroastrian religion and refer to local customs, such as the *āb zohr* and *Jashan* ceremonies, the overnight placing of jewellery in water vessels (*Čak-o doleh* or “pot of fate”, *morāduleh* or “bead pot”) and holy springs, such as Pīr-e Sabz. The cultic use of the Čāle Ğār caves spans a long period, however, from the 8th cent. B.C. to the 8th cent. A.D. The beginning of the cultic use of the caves – at that time no longer in use as mines – thus clearly precedes the rise of the Zoroastrian religion. Rather than actual Zoroastrian rites, what is archaeologically documented here must reflect older popular beliefs and practices. Some of these may very well have been later incorporated and officialised into Zoroastrianism or may have been adapted to Zoroastrian principles. Zoroastrianism is, however, not unique in its veneration of water and water divinities. It may suffice to refer to the importance of water divinities in the Elamite tradition with its open air sanctuaries, such as at Kurāngun where the platform floor is sculptured as a river packed with fish.¹ Four Elamite reliefs of 12th century date (usurped in the 8th–7th cent. by a local chieftain) flank the entrance to a cave-sanctuary with a spring at Šekāf-e Salmān (Salomon’s cave) near Īzeh in Kūzestān (Fig. 1). Two of the reliefs are in fact inside the entrance to the cave.² Unfortunately, we hardly have any information on the rituals that took place on such sites. In this regard the Čāle Ğār excavations are of great importance, as they are one of the very few that give us some insight into one of the many complex uses of ancient caves.

The ongoing studies of the Čāle Ğār finds will undoubtedly yield much more important insights.

The first results by Th. Stöllner and his collaborators presented in this volume have already made it clear, however, that the practices at Čāle Ğār were not uniform but changed or evolved considerably over time. Singular areas in the caves were used at different moments, layers of selected stones were found on top of offerings and also the character of the offerings seems to have changed over time. A. Abar pointed out that complete pottery vessels were more common in the earliest phase, whereas later, sherds or fragments were apparently preferred. According to the research of N. Bagherpour, jewellery deposits seem to have become increasingly more popular from about 300 B.C.

The presence of layers of selected stones covering offerings and also the possible displacement of votive objects from one area to another inside the caves (a hypothesis still to be confirmed by more research/on a possible *favissae* interpretation of this phenomenon videtur infra) points to some kind of organized managing, a collective social control of the cult place and/or the performance of rituals by relatively large groups of people (“public” ceremonies, see infra). It indicates that it was (or became) an institutionalized sacred place rather than a place of individual, spontaneous popular beliefs. In view of this, one should also envisage the possibility that not only the rituals, but also their significance and the control of the site may have changed over time.

Just like many “pagan” shrines in Roman Europe were Christianised by turning holy springs or sources into a baptistery,³ places of worship with permanent water, such as Čāle Ğār, may at some moment in time have been “zoroastrianised” to erase the memory of older and different traditions or beliefs and to gain clerical authority over local religious customs. The nature and placement of the votive offerings may possibly – but not necessarily – reflect such changes. At the same time, it is also of importance to establish that the votive offering came to a halt in the 8th century AD. This may have had many different reasons. The site may have become inaccessible to the population that used it, possibly as a result of wars, forced migrations or

¹ Vanden Berghe 1986, 160 Fig. 2,7.

² Amiet 1976; De Waele 1981.

³ See e.g. Cassiodorus’ letter of 527 AD *Variae* 8.33: Hodgkin 1886, 381–383.

Fig. 1
The Elamite cave sanctuary at Šekāf-e Salmān with four Elamite reliefs flanking the cave with its spring. – 1 situation in 1970–72 (according to De Waele 1972, 34); – and 2007 (photo by Ali Gharami, available at www.panoramio.com/photo/2215774)

other population displacements, or the nature of the local offering practices were such that they could not be Islamicized. This in itself would be remarkable, however, since many “Islamic” sacred sources, springs and water features are known in Iran.⁴ Pre-Islamic beliefs and practices associated with water, for example rain ceremonies, were often Islamicized and continued to exist up to recent times.

Many rain ceremonies are known from Islamic Iran,⁵ some are performed by private individuals⁶ and others have a more public character. I. Bařgöz presented a detailed study in which he distinguished no less than seven main groups or types of “Islamic” public rain-making ceremonies in Iran, all with obvious pre-Islamic roots.⁷ Most of these public ceremonies are known in many variants and are also found beyond the borders of Iran. They usually include prayers, processions, the slaughtering of animals and/or the preparing and cooking of food. Some processions are directed to rivers, wells or fountains and sometimes include the offering of foodstuffs to the water or throwing a pebble into a creek.⁸ An interesting “Islamic” rain-making ceremony, popular among Turkish tribes from China to Anatolia, involves large numbers of selected stones. Pebbles or “rain-stones” are collected and prayed upon as part of the ceremony to invoke rain, then they are returned to a wadi or riverbed.⁹ The number of stones can vary considerably but usually has a symbolic significance; it may be 700, 7.000 or even 70.000.¹⁰

The possibility that the Čāle Ğār caves are linked to a rain-making cult should be envisaged. Stöllner pointed out that local knowledge has it that there is always water in the caves, even in times of drought. In fact, he was told the story that one of the few complete ceramic vessels from the cave was found by a local who was dispatched to the cave to get water in one of the more recent dry periods. If rain-making offering rituals were performed at the Čāle Ğār caves, this may be one way of explaining the fluctuations in the intensity in which the offerings were apparently made. There would hardly be much need to make many offerings when there was no lack of water. The complete halting of the cult use of the caves in the 8th cent. A.D. could thus have been caused by a long period of ample rainfall. Two or three generations

may have sufficed to erase the custom from living memory. L. Beck provides a first hand observation among the Qařqai of the late 20th century on how fast such practices may in fact disappear. She wrote: “People still talked about the rain ceremonies they used to perform. . . . But by the mid-1990s most people did not actually engage in them, and children rarely knew anything about them”.¹¹ Another reason could be the arrival of Islam in the region. Bařgöz points out the apparent opposition of early Islam against the pre-Islamic rituals practised to obtain rain¹² and although many were eventually Islamicised, others may very well have disappeared forever.

Fig. 2
Lorestān horse bits with traces of use, note the distorted edge of the holes in the cheek pieces. – 1 Iran Bastan Museum, Tehrān (according to Izadpanah 2535/1976, colour plate); – 2 cheek plate in the shape of a horse in the collection of the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels and reverse of the hole (inset) (Inv. IR.37, acquired January 1932, PHOTO © RMAH, Brussels)

⁴ See Massé 1938, 225–237.

⁵ Massé 1938, 175–176.

⁶ Bařgöz 2007, 385 note 1.

⁷ Bařgöz 2007; see also Zwemer 2003, 61–64.

⁸ Massé 1938, 176; Bařgöz 2007, 389, 390.

⁹ For an Islamic account on the “rain-stone”, see Baber *et al.* 1826, xivii–xiviii.

¹⁰ Zwemer 2003, 62, 63; Bařgöz 2004; Bařgöz 2007, 397; Molnár/Zieme 1994, 72, 138.

¹¹ Beck 2003, 296. – On the ritual, see Beck 1991, 162.

¹² Bařgöz 2007, 396–397.

Fig. 3
Axe head from Lorestān
with cuneiform inscrip-
tion (translation and
photo after G. Dossin
1962, 158 Pl. 24)

Left side of the blade	Right side of the blade
Sage Marduk, <i>huhninnā-etena</i> , (pour) celui qui est attentif à tes sanctuaires contre ses ennemis dresse-toi. La sortie de ton, l'enchaînement de mes ennemis,	le renforcement de ma puissance-même, qu'ils soient ordonnés contre mes ennemis. De Nabuchodonosor, roi de l'Univers.

The rain-making interpretation may not cover all aspects of the Čāle Ğār caves though. Some of the votives, such as the silver sheet metal plaques with the depiction of an eye or in the shape of a foot¹³ point to a curative element. Possibly the water was ascribed curative powers and many of the offerings may represent pleas or tokens of gratitude. Explaining the different aspects of the Čāle Ğār cave finds will thus be a very complex task, since very different religious practices and beliefs may have interacted at this cult site. In the present contribution we will provide a survey – from an archaeologist's point of view – of sites with votive offerings and (cave) deposits in Iron Age Lorestān. Establishing the similarities and/or differences with Čāle Ğār may bring about a better understanding of both the Čāle Ğār caves and of Lorestān sites.

Before discussing the known votive offerings from Lorestān, we must reflect on the significance of the label “votive offering”. Many of the Iron Age Lorestān bronzes have been regarded as votive ob-

jects, simply because they were elaborately decorated or had a complex shape. Items like the ornate cheek plates of horse bits (**Fig. 2**), the axe blades with long spikes and strongly curved blades (**Fig. 3; 4,1; 5,1–2**) and the wide variety of idols that were reported from graves, were all considered by many early archaeologists as being votive offerings. Roman Ghirshman began in 1962 his paper on some unprovenanced inscribed bronzes with the sentence “Parmi les bronzes sortis du Lorestān, les mors dépassent certainement de beaucoup, par leur nombre considérable, les autres objets votifs. . . . Aucun d'eux ne portait le moindre signe d'usure, ni la plus petite trace des dents des bêtes qui les auraient portés. . . . l'homme, le char et l'attelage, constituent le sujet prédominant de ces mors, selon moi votifs, du Luristan.”¹⁴ Ghirshman reflected a widespread opinion, supported by the fact that several weapons were indeed identified as votives by their cuneiform inscriptions (**Fig. 3**).

¹³ See contribution by N. Bagherpour, in this volume.

¹⁴ Ghirshman 1962, 165.

Fig. 4
Lorestān axe heads with spikes. 1 an axe head with a dedicatory inscription to Marduk (according to Dossin 1962, Pl. 24); – 2 a depiction on a sheet metal plaque auctioned in 1993 (Cat. Christies 2000), and – 3 on a quiver plate in the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehrān (Seipel 2000, Cat. no. 103)

Fig. 5

Miniature axes. 1 – 3 from the shrine at Sorġ dom-e Lorġ; – 4–5 unprovenanced Lorestān miniatures; – 4 a unique hammer with spikes at the rear; – 5 dagger (1–3 according to Schmidt, Van Loon/Curvers 1989, Pl. 176; 4–5 Haerinck/Overlaet 1985, Fig. 7–8, Pl. 1)

Moorey had already pointed out, however, that it is often difficult to establish whether or not a horse bit had been used but that in some cases it

**Fig. 6**

Armament, a handle with horse head terminal and a long spouted teapot in a *favissa* deposit (?) at Sangtarāšān (photo: http://www.chnphoto.ir/search.php?search_query=Sangtarashan & lang=en&B1=Go)

was clearly used.¹⁵ The edge of the hole in a cheek piece at the Royal Museums in Brussels has clearly been distorted by the pressure of the mouthpiece (**Fig. 2,2**).¹⁶ This is also the case on a horse bit that was found in the 1970's at Kātunbān (**Fig. 2,1**),¹⁷ a clear indication that such objects had been used before being placed in the tombs.

The discovery of several spiked axe-heads during the excavations of tombs also demonstrated that they were indeed functional weapons. An evolution of the blades from less towards strongly curved seems to go hand in hand with the spikes becoming more prominent. It suggests that at the end of Iron Age II, the spikes were the most dangerous part of the weapon.¹⁸ There are very few depictions of such axe heads and unfortunately most are on unprovenanced objects: an umbo in Leiden of which the authenticity is strongly ques-

¹⁵ Moorey 1971, 107.

¹⁶ Speleers 1931, 65 Fig. 1; Potratz 1941/42, 187 Fig. 23.

¹⁷ Izadpanah 2535/1976, colour plate. – Haerinck *et al.* 2004, 145 Pl. 5.

¹⁸ Overlaet 2003, 166–172.

tioned,¹⁹ a quiver plaque in the Rezā Abbāsī Museum in Tehrān²⁰ and a small plaque that appeared on the art market in the 1990's.²¹ It shows two men with skirts that resemble those on a Bābā Jān III style vessel, acquired in 1960 from the Coiffard collection by the Cernuschi Museum.²² One of them holds a “late type” of axe head with the spikes pointed to the animal. The fact that spiked axe heads were sometimes deliberately broken or folded before they were placed in the tomb, making them useless to the living,²³ also indicates that they were actual weapons. All this indicates that the many bronzes that were found in tombs were effectively placed there as the “equipment” of the deceased. Likewise, the idols that were found in tombs must be regarded as personal emblems or sacred items of the deceased. They were not votives, in the sense that votives are given to obtain a favour from the gods or spirits or to indicate the gratitude of the donor.

All this does not exclude the use of “Lorestān bronzes” as votive offerings, neither does it mean that some bronzes could not have been especially made as votives and were thus never intended to be used. In fact, this is ascertained in some cases. We should not expect to find votive offerings in tombs, however. The place where objects were discovered is thus an important element in deciding on whether it is or can be a votive: small statuettes of animals and people found in Lorestān tombs were apparently worn as talismans²⁴ while identical pendants were placed as “votives” in the shrine at Sorkdom-e Lorī (to be discussed *infra*).

Among the many inscribed Lorestān bronzes (and bronzes that are claimed to come from Lorestān but are of a more general type) there are axe heads, daggers and swords, arrowheads etc.²⁵ A short discussion of the axe heads will demonstrate the aspects discussed above.

The text on the inscribed axe head above shows that it was dedicated to the god Marduk, an indication that it comes from a sanctuary. The axe head does not differ from the excavated axe heads found in tombs and seems to be a normal functional weapon. It does not mean on the other hand, that it was necessarily in use as such before it was inscribed and dedicated. Apparently, some axe heads were especially made as votives and thus



Fig. 7
Favissa deposits (?) of armament and vessels at Sangtarāšān, Lorestān (photos: http://www.chnphoto.ir/search.php?search_query=Sang-taras-han&lang=en&B1=Go)

differed in specific aspects from real weapons. One such example is a small axe head with a lion's head from the sanctuary at Sorkdom-e Lorī which lacks its shaft hole running through the axe head (visible in the top view on **Fig. 5,1**).²⁶ Another remarkable find from this sanctuary was a miniature spiked axe head of only 7.1 cm in length,²⁷ as well as a miniature 3rd mill. B.C. type axe head (**Fig. 5,3**).

Several similar unprovenanced miniatures are known²⁸ and several more were recently discovered in deposits, probably *favissae*, at Sangtarāšān, some 52 km to the south-east of Korramābād. Five miniatures from this site were shown at a temporary exhibition in 2006 at Kermānšāh on the occasion of the “International Symposium on Iranian Archaeology – Western Region”. It seems likely that such minia-

¹⁹ Muscarella 1977, 176; Muscarella 1988, 190–191.

²⁰ Seipel 2000, 100–103, Cat. no. 25.

²¹ Cat. Drouot 1993, 6, no. 2; Overlaet 2003, 172; Cat. Christie's 2000, lot 486.

²² Amiet 1976, 55–56 Fig. 37; Engel 2008, 206–208 Cat. 213.

²³ Overlaet 2003, 553–554.

²⁴ See, for example, tombs at Tappe Nurābād: Sajjadi/Samani 1999, Pl. 19–20 and Tappe Kazābād A, Stein 1940, 246–254 Pl. 10 no. 13; Overlaet 2003, 24 Fig. 13.

²⁵ See Calmeyer 1969, 161–174.

²⁶ Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 256 Pl. 176b; Overlaet 2003, 167–169 Fig. 135,4.

²⁷ Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 255–256 Pl. 176a; Overlaet 2003, 167 Fig. 135,3.

²⁸ Haerincq/Overlaet 1985, 392–394, 407–410 Fig. 2.

Fig. 8
Emämzāde Jabbār An-
sār. – 1–3 view of the
outside; – 4 inside of
the cupola; – 5 stones
placed on the tomb-
stone (1; 5 photo-
graphs according to
Izadpanah 1350/1971,
525, 527–528; 2–4
photographs by
E. Smekens)

tures were not exclusively made to be donated in a sanctuary but were also worn (or worn before they became votive offerings) as amulets.²⁹

The circumstances of the Sangtarāšān discoveries are such that they strongly suggest that several *favissae* were present. Following the rumours that illegal looting was going on at Sangtarāšān, the Iranian Archaeological services dispatched Mehrdad Malekzadeh to the site in the winter of 2005–2006. He was confronted with a looted area but was still able to discover several deposits of bronze and iron objects. The absence of tomb structures, skeletons and wall constructions made it soon clear that it was neither a cemetery, nor a sanctuary. These pits can only be categorized as *favissae*, pits in which surplus votive and cult objects were deposited. We have to await the full publication by the excavator to know whether any elements were discovered that tell us something about the rituals that usually are associated with such practices. At the moment we have little information about which types of objects were found in the same *favissa*. A detailed analysis may eventually tell us more about the extent of the period during which the area at Sangtarāšān was used for *favissae*. We have to await Malekzadeh's full study but some photographs were made available (**Fig. 6; 7**) and a number of objects can already be mentioned, providing us with some insight into the nature of these finds:

- large numbers of bronze swords and daggers, spearheads, arrowheads,
- 2 iron swords that were stuck vertically into the ground (see **Fig. 7,3**),
- an iron sword with cast-on bronze hilt,
- bronze halberds with a reclining lion on the back and a blade springing from a lion's head (at least 3 halberds) or with a bearded human face at the juncture (at least 1),
- bronze axe heads with 4 pins (at least 3 full size and 5 miniatures),
- a bronze pickaxe with 4 pins,
- a bronze pickaxe with 5 pins and with an iron blade that springs forth from lion's jaws,
- a miniature mortar and pestle,
- a whetstone with a bronze terminal in the shape of a goat,
- a small human statuette,
- two idols in the shape of opposed standing goats, one of them with a central tube of rolled sheet bronze,
- bronze vessels, including more than 50 so-called "teapots with long spout and base pouch". One of these has a pouch in the shape of a human face with inlaid eyes;

- a bronze handle that ends in the head of a horse with a pendant on its breast.

The alternative for the *favissae*-interpretation would be that the items were stashed away in times of danger, with the idea to retrieve them later. The presence of miniature weapons, a miniature mortar and pestle, and of small statuettes renders this unlikely. Comparable items were found in a sanctuary context at Sorḡdom-e Lorī, also together with bronze vessels, including teapots with long spout and base pouch.

Before discussing the important sanctuary with votive offerings at Sorḡdom-e Lorī, it is interesting to recall some of the stories about discoveries of "masses" of metal objects and to see whether any of these can be corroborated and

Fig. 9

The Kalmākarreh cave. 1 plan; – 2 view from the cave's entrance; – 3 a vessel on a stalagmite in room 2 (according to Chazanfari/Farzin 1997, Persian section pages 22–23, 26, 27)

²⁹ On the possible functions of such miniatures, see Haerincq/Overlaet 1985.

Fig. 10
Kalmākarreh. Confiscated silver rhytons in the Falak-ol Afāk Museum at Korramābād, both said to come from Kalmākarreh Cave (available at http://www.lorestanmirus.org/Web_Gallery/)

could refer to sanctuaries or *favissae*. Few things speak more to the imagination as treasure finds and almost everywhere in Lorestān, you can hear

stories about great and precious discoveries. When discoveries were really made, it is often impossible to know whether the finds came from one or more

tombs, a sanctuary or from *favissae*. In the archaeological literature these “treasure-finds” are commonly encountered. In his “Datierbare Bronzen aus Luristan und Kirmanshah”, Peter Calmeyer refers to a “large find of stone mace-heads, bronze vessels, mirrors, bells, weapons” at Češme Kassah, west of Kuhšahr near Tarkān,³⁰ upon which the newspaper Kayhan (“Universe”) from 17.04.1968 had reported. A photograph that accompanied the article showed some Early Bronze Age mace-heads/handles and an axe with an animal protome. More tangible information is not available, however. The story behind Freya Stark’s “The Valleys of the Assassins”³¹ is that of an archaeological treasure hunt. She travelled through Lorestān in an attempt to locate a cave with treasure. Her informant, a Lori she met in Baghdad, had a “treasure map” and part of a treasure that a tribesman had found in a cave, consisting of “20 cases of gold ornaments, daggers, coins and idols”. The part of the treasure he had managed to take away (half a dozen of daggers and a handful of jewels) had been in the property of Stark’s informant but – unfortunately – had it taken away from him. Stark describes her travels through the Pošt-e Kuh with much detail, but she failed to find the cave. According to her description (but she added a cautionary remark that some details were altered to keep the location a secret) it must have been within a days travel from Emānzāde Jabbār Ansār (Fig. 8). It remains a mystery whether the cave really existed and whether it really held “treasure”. If so, the objects could have belonged to a tomb, a sacred deposition/*favissa*, or it may simply have been a temporary hiding place. Caves were used in many ways. It suffices to look at Kunjī cave near Korramābād, where Palaeolithic and Neolithic layers were disturbed by two megalithic Early Bronze Age tombs, modern herding activities, a recent burial and military ground works for anti-aircraft batteries dating between 1963 and 1969.³² Caves are self-evident military shelters, offering protection and easy defence. The Kossaioi in southern Lorestān are said to have used caves for this purpose already at the time of Alexander the Great.³³

Caves were also used to stash away valuables in times of danger. When the contents of these stashes can have a religious significance, the interpretation becomes very difficult. The question that must be asked is whether the owner simply did not have possibility to retrieve them (e.g. the “Dead Sea scrolls”) or whether it could be a *favissa* (possible e.g. in the case of the Nahal Mišmar finds).

Very careful excavating is necessary to reveal eventual elements of ritual practices that could indicate the *favissa* use. Sometimes caves are also known to have been used simply for safe keeping without its use in itself being a secret. Major Rawlinson comments on one such cave he saw during his trip through the Čardavāl valley of the Pošt-e Kuh: “a small stream at Zangawan forces its way through a chasm in the Čarmin hills, and falls into the river which I have already described, and which is here called the Abi-Sirwan. The chasm is named the Bandi-Shamshab; and in its precipitous face is a cavern only accessible by a ladder of ropes, in which are usually deposited the arms, stores, and treasures of the Faili tribe. Zangawan is, in consequence of this natural stronghold, and the fruitful and abundant

Fig. 11
Kalmākarreh. Confiscated silver rhytons in the Falak-ol Aflāk Museum at Korramābād, said to come from Kalmākarreh Cave (available at http://www.lorestanmimiras.org/Web_Gallery/)

³⁰ Calmeyer 1969, 145.

³¹ Stark 1934.

³² Speth 1971; Emberling *et al.* 2002, 49, 79 “army floor”.

³³ Briant 1982, 67–69; Henkelman 2003, 225.

Fig. 12
Kalmākarreh. Confiscated silver rhytons, vases and cups in the Falak-ol Aflak Museum at Korramābād, said to come from Kalmākarreh Cave (available at http://www.lorestanmirus.org/Web_Gallery/)

character of the country around it, a favourite station for the encampment of the chieftain of Pushtikuh".³⁴

The cave deposits bring us to one of the most controversial events in Iranian archaeology of the last decades, the "discoveries" at a natural cave referred to as Kalmākarreh or simply the "Western Cave". Its name derives from a *karra* tree (an inedible species of fig tree) near the entrance of the

cave (*kalma* in Laki dialect). It is situated in a rocky valley to the NW of Pol-e Doktor and about 10 km to the north of the Saimarreh-Kašgan confluence (E 47°33'30" – N 33°13'45"). The information on the cave and its discoveries is very fragmentary. One has to rely on reports from archaeologists who explored the cave and on the results from the questioning of arrested smugglers and dealers.³⁵ An in-depth analysis of the information, the trafficking and the contents of the Kalmākarreh objects is provided by W. Henkelman.³⁶

To place these discoveries in their proper context, it is necessary to understand the location and the structure of the cave (**Fig. 9**). It is situated in a sparsely habitated area with little fresh water resources, on the southern flanks of the Maleh Kuh and overlooks the Saimarreh River and the Kašgan plain. From a nearby winter residence of the Hasanvand tribe, called Darbāk, a small track leads up to its entrance. Access is extremely difficult. The entrance is situated in a vertical westward facing cliff; about 30 meters below the mountain top, and the Iranian Archaeological Services had to build a 12 meter bridge to reach the entrance in safety. The cave never had an easy access and was thus never suited to become a habitation site, not even as a temporary dwelling.

Kalmākarreh is an enormous cave; it consists of 4 main rooms with heights of up to 15 meters. Its total surface is estimated to be about 4,300 m², the equivalent of 16 to 17 tennis courts! The distance from the entrance to the end of room 4 is according to one source 508 meters³⁷ and to another 670 m.³⁸ Passage from one space to another is difficult. The diameter of the interconnecting corridors and some of the entrance apertures reaches a mere 80 cm. Several large and small water pools are present throughout the cave (**Fig. 9,1**).

The passage from the first room to Room 2 is through a long pipe-like corridor at floor level of cave 1. Room 3 is about 8 meters lower than the entrance cave. The passage to room 4 is through an opening located 4 meters above the floor. Room 4 is a very spacious room with a large water pool encircled by stalagmites. It has a much higher humidity and temperature than the others rooms of the cave.

The cave was first explored in 1989/1990 by a delegation of the Lorestān branch of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation (ICHO). They reported hand-made stone walls laid with a mortar of plaster or pisé and scattered fragments of pottery in the

³⁵ Mo'tamedi 1371/1992; Chazanfari 1371(1992); Chazanfari/Farzin 1997.

³⁶ Henkelman 2003.

³⁷ Chazanfari 1371(1992), 15.

³⁸ Chazanfari 1997, 13.

³⁴ Rawlinson 1839, 52–53.

first gallery, jars set on top of two to three meter high stalagmites and fragments of pottery in the second, and also fragments of pottery on the floor of the third. Traces of the hand of man, scoured and polished in the course of time, are also visible on the vertical surface of the rock in which the aperture of the cave is situated.³⁹

Before a more extensive investigation of the cave was made, locals had also visited the cave and had stumbled upon an important stash of objects in room 4. According to the statements made following the first arrests, the first artefacts that were discovered in the cave were found in a chimney-like fissure close to a water pool in room 4. According to Motamedi this 4 meter long fissure is 3 m above the floor but reachable without using a ladder. Golden masks and some silver utensils would have been found there. This spectacular discovery brought on a more thorough search of the cave. Another stash, apparently of about 360 objects, mostly silver vessels and statuary, would have been discovered in between fallen rock, somewhere between the foot of the southern wall and 15 meter from the end of room 3.

A 35-day search was organised by ICHTO in 1992 following various arrests and confiscations of “Kalmākarreh” objects. They reported on the looting of 12 to 15 burials in room 1, the destruction and disappearance of the jars in room 2 and an enormous destruction in room 3. Apparently even explosives were used to “explore” stalagmites that were thought to contain treasure. The reports mention “small walls” made of stones and either a clay and straw mortar or a gypsum mortar. The vessels were apparently all large storage vessels with openings between 45 and 52 cm and most of them strengthened with cord-like bands. Sherds were found in the first three caves (thickness 8–11 mm) and they were apparently also used for the burials in room 1. Two types of jars are mentioned: jars with a rounded base and without a neck and jars with a more parabolic shape and a long neck that widens towards the mouth. Among the illustrated pottery claimed to be from Kalmākarreh are also sherds with painted designs: dark brown zigzag bands and short vertical bands on a light buff background. Also some stone objects, thought to be handles and a human skull were confiscated. At the time Chazanfari published his report in Athar, he mentioned that the Islamic Revolution Committee together with the Pol-e Doġtar gendarmerie had confiscated a large and a small silver animal ear, 2 curved metal bars that were milled at both ends, a gold human mask (without eyes, eyebrows, lips and chin) and 3 irregular sized bars, probably made

of silver. According to several statements, also 12 golden masks (one weighing ca. 120 g) a tray with a design of a winged horse, a rhyton in the shape of an ibex or bull’s head, 8 golden winged horses and a 50 cm long fish had been found.⁴⁰

The list of objects that derive from (or are said to derive from) Kalmākarreh has grown considerably since the first reports. It seems ascertained that a large treasure was indeed found. Apparently, most of the objects were quickly dispersed and many have since surfaced in various countries, galleries, auction houses and museums. As usual, for-

Fig. 13
Kalmākarreh. Various confiscated silver objects in the Falak-ol Aflāk Museum at Korramābād, said to come from Kalmākarreh Cave: circular plate, figure of a bowman, mask and teapot with long spout (available at http://www.lorestanmimas.org/Web_Gallery/)

³⁹ Chazanfari/Farzin 1997, 13–14.

⁴⁰ Chazanfari 1371/1992, 22–23.

Fig. 14
Emānzādeh at Tappe
Kānjānkāni (Deh Pīr)
Lorestān. Small stones
next to piled up column
bases marking the
grave (after Izadpanah
1535 (1976), 246
Fig. 6)

geries have been added to the corpus in the process and probably also genuine objects coming from different locations. The bottom line is that we will never have a clear picture about what exactly was found and how it was stashed in the cave. Among the many confiscated items that are now in the museum in Kōrramābād⁴¹ (see **Fig. 10–13**) and in the

National Museum in Tehrān⁴² are a wide variety of rhytons, jars, bowls and plates, as well as masks of different sizes, torques and bracelets with animal heads terminals. Of great importance are a number of vessels that bear cuneiform Elamite inscriptions referring to private individuals and to a royal house of Samati, probably a local kingdom in southern Lorestān during the 7th–6th cent. B.C. Henkelman provides a detailed discussion of these inscriptions and also a reconstruction of the events related to the discovery and the surfacing of the Kalmākarreh treasure.⁴³

Mo'tamedī concluded that the cave had not been permanently occupied but had to be seen as a short-period shelter, either by some thieves who wanted to hide their booty or by a small group of refugees fleeing to bring a treasure to safety. He suggested that the Kalmākarreh hoard may have been part of the Royal Achaemenian treasure that was taken from Susa to avoid its seizure by Alexander the Great. He ascribes the burials to the same period and suggests that it may have been persons involved in the hiding that were killed to keep the secret safe.⁴⁴

Since the treasure was hidden in at least two different cavities in room 3 and 4 of the cave, and since the nature of the treasure clearly indicates that the majority of the items had a cultic use, one should envisage the possibility that these hiding places were in fact *favissae*. They may not have been temporary hiding places in the face of danger but simply permanent depositaries of redundant/excess votive offerings and cultic utensils. It seems probable that they may have been disposed of on various moments rather than all at the same time, hence the different cavities and locations in the cave. As to the tombs, these may have nothing to do with the hoard. It is also uncertain what the function of the stone walls was in room 1, but they may have been part of constructions related to the tombs. The function of the storage vessels on the stalagmites also remains to be explained. Large storage vessels were, of course, also common in Bronze Age tombs (as is demonstrated e.g. by the Kunjī Cave finds), but there is no mention of any tombs or constructions in room 2. The jars set on top of two to three meter high stalagmites could, however, also have been Zoroastrian dahmas, since funerary vessels are known to have been placed on top of stone pillars in the Sasanian era.⁴⁵ The use of gypsum mortar on some of the small walls in room 1 might be an additional argument for a late

Fig. 15
Selection from the hoard of stones discovered at the Sorḵdom-e Lorī shrine (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, Pl. 215)

⁴¹ Falak-ol Aflak museum: see http://www.lorestanmiras.org/Web_Gallery/index.php.

⁴² Seipel 2000, 200–212 Cat. no. 116–117; 123; Stöllner *et al.* 2004, 794–796 Cat. nos. 512–516.

⁴³ Henkelman 2003, 214–227 Pl. 9–15.

⁴⁴ Mo'tamedī 1992, 10–12.

⁴⁵ See Trümpelmann 1984.

date of all the storage vessels in room 1, 2 and 3. One could wonder whether these walls were not supports for the storage vessels of which the sherds were found in room 1. Unfortunately, it will never be possible to resolve these questions unless reliable witnesses or testimonies would come forth.

Henkelman had already suggested that the hoard may represent a collection of votive objects from a sanctuary in view of the collective storage of vessels with so many different names of individuals (both royal and private) and in view of the use of a specific vocabulary.⁴⁶ A. D. H. Bivar placed a “Kalkmakarreh” vessel (presently in the Miho Museum) with an animal that wears a mask that is similar to the confiscated gold and silver masks in the museums at Korramābād and Tehrān in an early Mithraic context.⁴⁷ The large number of “libation” vessels (many animal-shaped with sprinkler holes in the muzzle or nostrils) may support the idea of a cult

context. Among the libation vessels one may not only have to reckon the rhytons and long-spouted teapots, but also the “drinking bowls”, since such cups were also used in libation ceremonies.⁴⁸ Long-spouted vessels are also well represented in the Sangtarāšān deposits (**Fig. 6; 7**) and some were also found in the Sorḡdom-e Lorī shrine (**Fig. 25**). The alleged discovery of statues and unusual items such as the sets of animal ears, masks and a “50 cm long fish”⁴⁹ all fits in very well with this hypothesis.

The idea of *favissae* in caves should also be retained in the case of the Čāle Ġār finds. The possibility exists that votive offerings were brought in from elsewhere (a nearby shrine or temple?) and ritually disposed of in the caves. This would not exclude the use of the caves as a cult site itself,

Fig. 16
Sorḡdom-e Lorī. Plan of the site at the time of the excavations (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, Pl. 48)

⁴⁶ Henkelman 2003, 226–227.

⁴⁷ Bivar 2005, 349–351, 356 Fig. 7.

⁴⁸ See e.g. a 7th cent. relief of Assurbanipal: Barnett 1959, 31 Pl. 90; 97.

⁴⁹ A 24.2 cm long fish shaped vessel in gold was part of the Oxus hoard, see Dalton 1964, No. 16 Pl. 6; Curtis/Tallis 2005, 131 Cat. 150.

Fig. 17
Sorkdom-e Lori. Top:
views of the slope with
the location of the temple,
Schmidt's camp and the Bronze
Age tombs (according to Schmidt
et al. 1989, Pl. 36 and Schmidt
1938, Fig. 3)

maybe as an annex or as a subsidiary of the main (controlling) shrine. It would help to explain why large numbers of votive offerings were discovered at the very end of the cave which is difficult to

reach and which would necessitate each individual in turn to reach the end of the cave. It could also explain the apparent "displacement" of large quantities of votive offerings and the covering up of

masses of votive offerings with a layer of selected stones. These stones could be a specific part of the *favissa*-ritual or could have been offerings themselves that also needed to be disposed of. The habit of donating or placing selected stones in or near a shrine is well known from Islamic times. When approaching the Imamzadeh of Djabar Ansar in Pošt-e Kuh Lorestān (**Fig. 8**), it is the habit to pile up stones as soon as the shrine comes in view.⁵⁰ It signifies the will of the visitor to contribute to the uphold of the shrine and indicates his willingness to return to it. It is a widespread custom that is observed in many places.⁵¹ Sometimes such stones are also placed inside the shrine. A fine example is the modest Imamzadeh made up of a rectangular stone enclosure around the tomb at Tappe Kānjān-kāni (Deh Pīr) in Lorestān. Globular stones are piled up next to a “tombstone” that consists of piled up column bases (**Fig. 14**). A similar phenomenon was noticed at Emāmzāde Jabbār Ansār in the Badr district where stones were placed on top of the grave inside of the building (**Fig. 8,5**).

It is interesting to note that Schmidt reported on the discovery of a group of 21 stones (**Fig. 15**), described as a “hoard of hematite and other stone weights” in the Iron Age shrine at Sorkdom-e Lorī.⁵² There was one disc shaped stone, 15 of different shapes but with one flat polished side and 5 without any flattened side. The authors suggested the flat side kept the stones from rolling. The variety in shapes and the polished side do not really support a use as weight, however, but suggest a more specialised use. Why they were found as a hoard in the shrine remains to be explained. That they could be a votive offering is just one of the many possibilities.

This brings us to the last site that needs to be discussed, the shrine at Sorkdom-e Lorī, the “red slope of the Lurs” (**Fig. 16–26**). At the moment, it is the only Iron Age shrine in which Lorestān bronzes were discovered. Rumours about a second looted shrine at Tang-e Homāmlān could not be corroborated.⁵³

Sorkdom-e Lorī is, once again, one of these sites which were largely plundered before any official excavations took place. Apparently, the site was discovered accidentally after heavy rains had exposed some objects amidst “boulder ruins” on a slope above the small village at Sorkdom-e Lorī. Commercial digging was stopped by the authorities and the site was brought to the attention of E. F. Schmidt who was at the time directing an expedi-

tion in Lorestān on behalf of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology. Schmidt excavated at Sorkdom from 7 until 25 June 1938 and discovered Bronze Age tombs, settlement remains and an Iron Age temple. Schmidt later referred to this temple as “our archaeological Bonanza”.⁵⁴ Within less than 3 weeks, the expedition excavated part of a temple, made plans and photographs and registered no less than 1804 objects. Since votive deposits were found underneath floors and inside the walls, it was decided at the end of the expedition to discontinue the systematic excavation per square and instead to follow the walls in the hope of discovering more deposits. Even so, only a part

Fig. 18
Sorkdom-e Lorī. View from the central room towards the entrance corridor (top) and the excavations of the sanctuary in progress (bottom) (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, Pl. 36; Pl. 40)

⁵⁰ Haerinck/Overlaet 2008, 291–292, 295–296 Pl. 10.

⁵¹ Massé 1956, 394, 518.

⁵² Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 352, 557, 561 Pl. 215.

⁵³ See Overlaet 2003, 29–30.

⁵⁴ Schmidt 1938, 205–6.



Fig. 19
Sorkdom-e Lori. Views
of the village and its
surroundings, Septem-
ber 2003

of the temple could be excavated, however, and we do not have its complete plan (see **Fig. 21**). Schmidt published a small preliminary report on the expedition⁵⁵ but the final publication was written by M. N. van Loon and H. Curvers. It was published more than 50 years after the excavations.⁵⁶

Schmidt discovered the remains of several buildings on the Sorġdom-e Lorġ slope. The main temple was separated by a street from another building (**Fig. 21**, square KG) of which only a small part was excavated. Another 10 by 10 square was excavated to the NE of the temple (**Fig. 21**, square GK). Building remains flanking a narrow street were found, but since, only some sherds were discovered (not documented); the excavation in this area was soon abandoned. Although the date of the building in square GK is not established, the general situation indicates that the temple was not an isolated building but was situated amidst a cluster of buildings.

The stratigraphy of the Sorġdom-e Lorġ temple is exceptionally complex and many questions remain as to the precise nature and the chronology of the sanctuary. The temple had several building phases and deposits of votive objects were found under the different floors and in the walls (**Fig. 23**). Ascribing these wall hoards to a specific building phase proved to be difficult, however, and much uncertainty remains as to which objects belong to which period.⁵⁷ An additional problem was the fact that many of the objects were considerably older than the construction date of the temple.

Before discussing this in more detail, it is useful to sketch the main development phases of the temple. Layer 3B, the so-called “predecessor building”, represents the oldest phase at this particular location. Little remains of it, however, a cobble floor and some wall fragments: massive stone foundations (1.5 m wide!) with part of a mud-brick superstructure in a few places. The size in itself suggests that once a large and important building stood at this location. The presence of large storage vessels in this building brought on the suggestion that the site may have been an economic centre during the Late Bronze Age.

A sterile layer separates this Predecessor Building from the actual “level 2C temple” (**Fig. 21**). A new shrine was built and votive offerings were buried beneath its floor. During each of the subsequent rebuilding or renovation phases, more groups of objects were buried or incorporated into the walls (**Fig. 22–26**).

The temple was accessed from the street through a long ascending corridor ending on a few steps (added when the floor was raised in phase



Fig. 20
Sorġdom-e Lorġ. Plundered tombs on the hill above the modern village (September 2003)

2B) and a door that closed off a central room or hall (**Fig. 23,1**; a door socket was preserved *in situ*, see **Fig. 18,1**). The large central space was either an open courtyard with an altar/hearth or a roofed hall with a central column, depending on the interpretation of the mud-brick construction in the middle (**Fig. 21**). The cross-shaped lay-out of large mud-bricks may have been a stabilizing bench around a central wooden column⁵⁸ but Schmidt pointed to the ashes and animal remains that were found in the central opening to argue that it acted as an

⁵⁵ Schmidt 1938.

⁵⁶ Schmidt *et al.* 1989.

⁵⁷ Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 50, 59

⁵⁸ Van Loon/Curvers compared it to a similar construction at Hasanlu; for another similar construction at Nuš-e Jān, see Stornach/Roaf 2007, 164 Fig. 7,4.

Fig. 21
Sorkdom-e Lorī. Plan and cross-sections of the temple and detail of the central edifice in the temple (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 50–51; 54)

Fig. 22
Sorkdom-e Lorī. Plan of
the temple's later alte-
rations (according to
Schmidt *et al.* 1989,
Pl. 53)

Fig. 23
Sorkdom-e Lorī. Wall deposit nr. JI-178: Schmidt excavating the wall deposit and details of the deposit (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, text vol. p. ii; plates vol. Pl. 41; Pl. 51)

altar. The former may be the most convincing idea, however, since such an altar construction would be unique and a hearth is already present along the south-west wall. A low staircase in the south-west corner must have given access to the roof of rooms 10 and 11. These rooms were lower on the slope and only a few steps were thus needed to

reach their roof (see cross section A-A on **Fig. 21**). A cella with a recessed entrance, a detail which indicates its religious function,⁵⁹ was present in the north-eastern corner of the central column-hall (**Fig. 24**). In a later renovation (level 2B), this cella's floor was raised and three access steps to the cella were added. In the last major renovation of the building (2A) the floor in the column-hall itself was raised.

The deposition of votive objects underneath the floors and in the wall constructions is attested in phases 2A, 2B and 2C. Among the votive offerings are seals, shells, jewellery (beads, rings, bracelets . . .), amulets, figurines of animals, human statuettes, miniature weapons, bronze vessels and particularly a large numbers of pins (**Fig. 23; 25–26**). Of special interest are the pins with large heads, either cast-on or of hammered sheet metal. These pins are a unique element. Up to now, not a single other site in Lorestān is known to have produced similar pins. Comparable ones that are currently kept in various collections and museums⁶⁰ are likely to derive mainly from Sorkdom-e Lorī, since the temple was already partially dug before the arrival of Schmidt.

Based on ethnographic parallels, van Loon and Curvers suggested the possibility that the numerous pins may have been donated to the temple as a sort of “contract registration”. A similar tradition is known among the Bahārvand in the Zagros Mountains. Marriage agreements among the Bahārvand are confirmed by the giving of a pin by the family of the bride to that of the groom.⁶¹ The shrine could thus not only have functioned as a religious centre but could also have had an administrative and economic significance.

The sterile layer between the remains of the *Predecessor Building* and the 2C *sanctuary* indicates that there was an interruption in the occupation of the site, at least at this specific location. Based on the presence of a cylinder seal among the 2C deposited objects,⁶² the construction of the temple can not be dated before the 9th–8th century.⁶³ Van Loon and Curvers suggest that the sanctuary remained in general use during the 8th and early 7th century, followed by a short final revival under Elamite influence in the first half of the 7th century.

Although some evolution and changes were noticed among the votive deposits attributed to le-

⁵⁹ Roaf 1998, 70.

⁶⁰ De Clercq-Fobe 1978; Ayazi 2004.

⁶¹ Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 489; see also Demant-Mortensen 2010.

⁶² Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 416, 487 Pl. 233,51. – Compare with Hae-rinck/Overlaet 2004, 78–79 Fig. 38, Pl. 42,151.

⁶³ Schmidt *et al.* 1989, 487.

vels 3A to 2B, there is little substantial material to establish a detailed chronology. However, noticeable among the votive deposits is the presence of objects that are considerably older than the period in which they were buried. The temple contained many Bronze Age and even Chalcolithic items (particularly seals were common). If we add to this the fact that votive deposits were also buried underneath the first floor, i.e. at the moment the 2C shrine was being constructed, we can not escape the conclusion that this can not have been a “new” pious foundation at Sorḵdom-e Lorī. It must have been the continuation of an existing tradition. It may have been the extension of another (nearby?) shrine or it may have been the rebuilding of a shrine at a new location (e.g. close to one that was somehow demolished; earthquakes, fire, war ...?), hence the sterile layer. The first groups of votive deposits that were buried must have come from another place of worship since it is difficult to imagine that superfluous votives would have been available for burying before the shrine even existed. In this context, we must emphasize that Schmidt was only able to excavate a very small part of the building remains at the site. Much had already been looted and he had only a limited amount of time. The plan on **Fig. 16** and **Fig. 21** clearly demonstrate that the buildings extended over a much larger area than the excavated surface.

Conclusion

It may be clear from the survey of possible *favissae* and shrines with votive offerings in Iron Age Lorestān that the information at our disposal remains extremely fragmented and is open to many interpretations. Religious practices are difficult to grasp when written sources are lacking, particularly in a region and period on which we know hardly anything about the population, its religion or its way of life. What seems to be straightforward at first can be very misleading when one critically analyses the data. Ethnographic parallels may help to understand the general principles of religious practices but can not simply be transferred to cultures that are several millennia older.

In Lorestān, the unexcavated material still outweighs the information that derives from scientific excavations. The central Iranian site of Čāle Ğār positively stands out, as one of the few – if not the only – well and completely excavated cave sanctuaries in Iran. Still, parallels between the finds at Čāle Ğār and the Lorestān deposits can be noticed, allowing us to make some suggestions and interpretations. The apparent relocation of groups of votive objects in Čāle Ğār and their covering with layers of

selected stones is clearly something that does not agree with the idea of a cult place that was used by individuals to bring offerings as a plea or token of gratitude. It suggests the “managing” of the site by an organised group or “clergy”. This may be from a related or nearby shrine that acted as the owner/manager of the caves. As a comparable system, one can think of the present-day constructions near the “cave and spring” at Pir-e Sabz in central Iran (Yazd province) and even of the churches near the Roman-Catholic “cave with spring” at Lourdes in France. Specific offerings, including also food offerings (animal and plant remains), that were found scattered and close to the entrance of the caves (possibly thrown in from the entrance) could repre-

Fig. 24
Sorḵdom-e Lorī. View towards the cella (top) and the entrance to the column-hall with the indication of the floors of the renovation phases 2B and 2A. (according to Schmidt et al. 1989, 44a; 45b)

Fig. 25
Sorḫdom-e Lorī. Selection of votive offerings: vessels (top), bronze sheet metal objects (middle), bronze animal figurine and pair of horns. (according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, plates)

Fig. 26
Sorkdom-e Lorī. Selection of votive pins in bronze (top) and bone (bottom; according to Schmidt *et al.* 1989, plates)

sent the more individual cult-activity at the cave site.

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Summary

The possibility that the Čāle Ġār caves with their votive offerings are related to a rain-making cult is explored by comparison with Islamic traditions. The site is further compared with Iron Age sites in Lorestān, in particular with the Sangtarāšān finds, the Kalmākarreh cave and the Sorkdom-e Lorī shrine. It is suggested that the finds at Sangtarāšān and Kalmākarreh are *favissae*. This custom is well documented at Sorkdom-e Lorī. Although there are strong indications that some of the finds at Čāle Ġār are *favissa* deposits (groups of relocated votives covered up with stones), the caves must have been a cult place that was also used for individual offerings.

