THE IRON AGE “ZAGROS GRAVEYARD” NEAR SANANDAJ (IRANIAN KURDISTAN):
PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON

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Abstract: An Iron Age graveyard, for the most part dating from the 8th - 7th century BC, was accidentally discovered in 2008 during road works near Sanandaj, Iranian Kurdistan. Rescue excavations were conducted by the Cultural Heritage Department in Sanandaj. The present contribution reports on these first excavations during which more than 20 graves were discovered in two squares and a trench. A selection of the graves and the burial goods are discussed.

Keywords: Kurdistan, Iran, Iron Age, Graveyard, Zagros Cemetery

The Iron Age “Zagros Graveyard”, located in the Iranian province of Kurdistan, was accidentally discovered in November 2008 (Aban 1387) during the widening of the Hasanabad – Sanandaj road. The site is situated close to Zagros Town, at the foot of the Abidar discontinuous mountain and to the southwest of Sanandaj (Pl. 1 & 2). Mr. Faeq Tawhidi directed the rescue excavations. Two squares and a trench were excavated and more than 20 graves were discovered. The excavations indicated that the graveyard is certainly more extensive but the remainder was left for future excavations.

None of the authors of the present report participated in the excavations and we are grateful to the Cultural Heritage Department in Sanandaj for putting some of the Sanandaj material at our disposal, as well as to Mr. Eqbal Azizi who made the pottery drawings.

The initial press-reports on the Sanandaj graveyard mentioned the discovery of five burials with spears, bronze bracelets and earthenware during the first week of the excavations (Paivand News 11/20/2008). Within a week, however, a hoax was created around this discovery that gained worldwide momentum through blogs and websites. Reports and press releases began mentioning the discovery of six corpses instead of five and they became a “mummified king and five of his bodyguards”. This media frenzy was supported by a 36 seconds video-fragment that was placed on You Tube and various other sites. It is the orchestrated “discovery” of a bearded mummified “king” with a crown, a gem
encrusted gold box and two gems encrusted “gold” plates with cuneiform inscriptions. One of these was fish-shaped and placed on the chest; the other had the shape of a loincloth with an Achaemenid type spouted jar depicted on the front (apparently copied from the Persepolis reliefs). The forgery was so crude that no professional archaeologist could ever be fooled by it but many others were and unfortunately such Indiana Jones style stories are persistent and keep circulating on the web (see e.g. a press release d.d. 11.27.2008: http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc112708KNC.html cited by e.g. http://archaeonews.blogspot.com/2008/11/embalmed-corpse-of-king-was-discovered.html). It is noteworthy in this context that another famous “Persian mummy” was confiscated in Pakistan a few years earlier, in October 2000, while it was offered for sale on the antiquities market. This forgery had to pass as an Achaemenid princess. Like the “king” she had gold foil sheets with “cuneiform inscriptions”. We have no information on the present whereabouts of the “mummified king” or on whether this was indeed an actual human mummy or rather a wax sculpture or some other kind of creation. We hope this preliminary report may for once and for all put an end to the speculations and conspiracy stories related to this hoax on Sanandaj.

Fig. 1. Fake “royal mummy” claimed to have been discovered in 2008 at the Sanandaj graveyard (image IRNA-Islamic Republic News Agency).
In this preliminary report, a survey of the main material of the first season is presented. We are convinced these preliminary notes are of use for the ongoing research on the Iron Age. The pivotal region of Kurdistan has not witnessed much archaeological research so far and reliable, excavated and published material is limited. This makes the “hijacking” of excavations such as the one at Sanandaj for ulterior reasons, all the more regretful. We hope that the publication of this preliminary report on the facts contributes to a sound and scientific approach of the matter.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCAVATED AREAS

Two adjoining squares (A and C) were excavated, in total 60m². A trench of 4m² (B) was dug perpendicular to the hillside to establish the extent of the graveyard (Pl. 3).

– Square A (Pl. 3-4) measured 6 by 6 m and was excavated to a depth of 2.80 m in its northeastern part and 1.20 m in its south-western part. Some fifteen tombs were recognised, the majority of which had unfortunately been disturbed. Three of the tombs stand out because of their construction, the number and the quality of the grave goods and because of their orientation and position of the body. These graves (6A, 10A and 12A) will be discussed infra in more detail.

– Square C (Pl. 3) measured 6 by 4 m and joined to the southwest of square A. The surface layer of some 0.10 m contained no artefacts and was on top of another sterile layer of some 0.40 m. The tombs were found further down. Seven simple pit burials could be identified. Isolated bead concentrations, bone fragments and pottery probably indicate the presence of additional disturbed interments.

– Trench B (Pl. 3-4) measured 4 by 1 m and was excavated to a depth of 1.25 to 1.70 m. It was located to the south of square C and it is positioned perpendicularly to the slope. In the top layer some human bones and some potsherds were encountered and further down two simple pit burials, each one with one individual.

TOMB TYPES AND MODES OF INTERMENT

Although many graves were apparently disturbed or only a few sherds and some bone fragments remained, differences in tomb construction and burial practices could still be observed at Sanandaj.
– The majority of the tombs were simple pit burials without any remaining cover stones. Some of these contained intact interments, while others had been disturbed and only a few pieces of bone or a skull were left.
– Five pit burials were covered by large cobblestones, ca. 15 to 25 cm in diameter (Pl. 5).
– At least three graves were covered with large flat slabs (Pl. 5, 9, 12) (tombs A2, A10 and A12). Stone slabs put on edge also delineated the burial pit of one of these, A12.

Three tombs differ from the remainder of the graveyard (tombs A6, A10 & A12). They have wealthier grave goods and the position of the body in the tomb is different. All three are placed on their back with extended legs (Pl. 4). As far as could be distinguished (many skeletons were too much deteriorated or were disturbed), all other bodies were deposited in a flexed or slightly crouched position, lying on either their left or their right side. All three have the same orientation (approximately E-W, with the head to the West), which they share, with only a few of the other interments. A10 and A12 were also covered with flat stone slabs (Pl. 9, 12).

It should be mentioned that no identification of the bones was done by a physical anthropologist. Whereas the majority of the tombs seem to have been individual interments, at least two of the tombs contained an adult and a child. Two of the exceptional tombs, A6 and A12, contained the skeleton of a child that was placed between the legs of the adult. On the plan of square A, two more skulls are indicated against the outside of the stone lining of tomb A12 while a third skull is present inside the tomb, next to the left shoulder of the deceased (Pl. 4).

THE THREE PRINCIPAL TOMBS

As stated above, tombs A6, A10 and A12 are exceptional because of their construction, the wealth of the burial goods, the placing of the deceased’s body and because of the presence of a child’s skeleton between the legs of the adult in tombs A6 and A12. This warrants a more detailed description of these tombs before we discuss the grave goods of this cemetery in general. In the other graves only a few items were found, mostly some pottery, a few iron or bronze objects and beads.

Tomb A6: (Pl. 2, 4, 6-8) This tomb contained the outstretched skeleton of an adult lying on its back with the remains of a child between thighs and
legs. The body had a broad but undecorated bronze belt around the waist (Pl. 6-8). The tomb also contained a so-called bronze "inkpot/inkwell vessel" at the waist of the grown-up, bronze bracelets on the wrists/lower arm of the adult (Pl. 34), an iron spearhead at chest height and a pottery jar above the head (Pl. 33). A large bronze dish (Pl. 34), a bronze stud and a pottery vessel may have accompanied the child since it is positioned near the feet of the adult. The tomb contained also various sorts of beads.

Some more human remains, apparently of two different individuals, were present near the adult’s right foot; it is a child’s skull and an adult’s mandible.

Tomb A10: (Pl. 4, 9-11) This tomb was covered with a flat roof made of several stone slabs (Pl. 5, 9). It contained an outstretched skeleton placed on its back. However, the situation within this tomb is not very clear. Two skulls are visible on the photograph (Pl. 9) and one wonders whether a second skull was deposited in the tomb or whether this points to a disturbance of the burial. Burial goods include a bracelet (at the height of the shoulder), a fibula (Pl. 11), a bronze bowl (Pl. 11) and pottery vessels (Pl. 10-11).

Tomb A12: (Fig. 2, Pl. 4-5, 12-22) the rectangular tomb was the only one that was outlined with stones that were put on edge (Pl. 4). It was covered with several large slabs. Nevertheless, the situation inside this tomb is complicated. There were certainly two skeletons, an adult and a child. Both were in an outstretched position with the child placed between the legs of the adult. The child may have been placed later in the tomb in view of the disturbance at the right side of the grown-up and the mix of material found at the right side of the waist. There was yet another skull on the left side of the adult (Pl. 4) but this one could be from an earlier grave, disturbed when this one was constructed, or from a later one. A sketch made during the excavations (Fig. 2) shows this skull at the same level as the capstones of A12, which suggests that it may have been a later grave that was placed on top of A12. It is accompanied by a vessel at the same level. Several more skulls were found immediately around grave A12; two were present along the outer side of the tomb (Pl. 4). Tomb A12 contained a large number of grave goods. These included a bronze bowl (Pl. 15), a pottery vessel (note the shifting of its position on plates 12-13 & 16 against Pl. 14). Its original position was probably next to the head, as was the case in tombs A6 and A10. There are also different kinds of beads (Pl. 18-21), a series of metal bracelets, pins and studs (Pl. 16-18) as well as worked shell and six cylinder seals — the only ones found at the site — of limestone or frit/faience (Pl. 22).
Fig. 2. Field sketch of tomb A12. Left: Capstones with a skull and a pottery vessel at the same level. Right: some of the finds and skeletal remains in situ during the excavations.

THE BURIAL GOODS

POTTERY (Pl. 23-32)

This category includes mainly bowls, mugs, jars with and without lugs and pitchers. With the documentation presently at our disposal, it was not possible to link every vessel to a specific tomb in this preliminary report. Some tombs contained only one vessel, others two or three, four or even five. They are mostly made of rather coarse and likely handmade sand tempered ware with a buff to reddish or greyish paste. Most of these are undoubtedly simple daily household equipment of local manufacture. A few vessels stand out, however, because of their decoration or shape. Three vessels have an incised/impressed decoration (Pl. 11, 25) and two beakers display an exceptional relief decoration pending below the rim (Pl. 23). It consists of small rectangular and more or less triangular elements.
Two spouted vessels were found in A15 (Pl. 23-24). The one with the bridged beak through-spout belongs to a type that is common from Iron II onwards and continued probably also in Iron Age III (Overlaet 2003: 7, fig. 2). It is a quite common type that is present at most sites, particularly in NW-Iran (e.g. Hasanlu) and on the Central Plateau (Tepe Siyalk). Further south, in W-Iran (e.g. in Luristan “kite ware”), the type is rare (Overlaet 2003: 40-41, 43, fig. 27, 29). It might occur there only from late Iron Age II onwards. A closely resembling vessel was discovered in an Iron Age III tomb at War Kabud, in Pusht-i Kuh Luristan (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 32-33, fig. 10 n° 10, Pl. XVII, Pl. 99: B175-2).

BRONZE OBJECTS

Bronze was used for the production of vessels, pins and ornaments (bracelets, rings, S-shaped items and further decorations for outfit, such as for garments and horse trappings, tweezers, beads and in one case also for a belt.

Bronze vessels

Only four vessels made of sheet metal were excavated (Pl. 34). Two were found in tomb A6 (Pl. 6-8), one in tomb A10 (Pl. 9, 11) and one in A12 (Pl. 15).

A simple deep plain dish with a large flat base and everted wall comes from tomb A6 (cfr. War Kabud: Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: fig. 20 n° 2; Pl. 135: A103-6); another bowl with a large flat base and concave walls (tomb A10) can be compared to bowls from War Kabud (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: Pl. 138: A37-4) and Djub-i Gauhar (Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: ill. 15 n° 7, Pl. 33, 77b), both in Pusht-i Kuh, Luristan.

An example of a so-called “inkpot/ink-well vessel” was found in tomb A6. This type of squat jar with broad splayed, concave neck and a profiled, constricted body is a good chronological indicator and is quite common during the Iron Age III in Luristan (e.g. seven examples at War Kabud, Haerinck & Overlaet: 61, fig. 20-13, Pl. 142-143; five examples at Chamahzi Mumah, Haerinck & Overlaet 1998: 28, Pl. 64; two examples at Djub-i Gauhar, Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 30-31, ill. 15: 10-11, Pl. 78). This type is also quite well represented in collections (e.g. Moorey 1971, 264-265, n° 503-504; Muscarella 1988: 260-262). The type was equally present at Uruk/Warka, in S-Iraq (Pedde 1992: 22, Taf. 22 & 25).

Finally, a bowl from tomb A12 is almost entirely decorated with punched pointed petals resembling the overlapping scales of pinecones. A
vessel from the Iron Age III graveyard of Djub-i Gauhar, in Pusht-i Kuh, belongs to the same type though its decoration shows more rounded decorations (Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 30-31, ill. 15 n° 3, Pl. 25 & 76b).

Bronze semi-circular/bow shaped fibula

In tomb A10 a bronze semi-circular/bow shaped spring-fibula with symmetrical beading was found (Pl. 11). The catch, cast with the arc, has the shape of a human hand with fingers indicated. The bow itself is ridged and the two extremities, close to the hand and the attachment of the spring, are square in section. This type of fibula belongs to Pedde’s type B.3 (Pedde 2000: 139-140, Taf. 15-16; particularly Taf. 16 n° 209 and 212, fibulae from Lachish and Tell en-Nasbeh, are very good parallels). The type is to be dated in the 7th and early 6th century BC.

Bronze belt

The only belt found comes from tomb A6 (Pl. 2, 6-8). It has convex sides and was found in situ around the waist of the body. We have at the moment no information on the way it was closed. Metal belts have a long history in Iran and are particularly popular during the Iron Age, e.g. in the Caucasus, NW- and W-Iran and particularly well represented are the numerous decorated Urartian examples (Calmeyer 1989). The earliest metal specimen comes from Susa and dates back to mid 3rd millennium BC (Carter 1980: 75-77, fig. 22).

Bronze S-shaped items (Pl. 17)

Similar S-shaped bronze wire elements have been excavated at various sites in Iran but their function remains uncertain. It has been suggested for the excavated examples at Haftavan Tepe that they might be earrings (Tala’i & Aliyari, 2009: 97, Pl. 7). However, it seems also plausible to consider some of them as a kind of system to secure a string of beads or as decorations for scarfs. Numerous examples were found in tombs of Siyalk VI (e.g. Ghirshman 1939, Pl. XVIII, XXVIII, XLVIII, L, LXIX, LXX, LXXI etc.). Quite often they occur in clusters of several specimens that are interlocked and were found at both sides of the face.

Bronze “banjo-shaped” pendant (Pl. 19)

Tomb A12 also contained two so-called “banjo-shaped” objects that are usually seen as a part of a horse trapping. They consist of a circular disk with an extension on one side with a single or double bars. On the back they have a cast loop for attachment. Several variants of this type of object
are known but they were excavated at merely a few sites. There are two main types, those with a rolled top (such as at Hasanlu IV: de Schauensee & Dyson 1983: 71, fig. 18 no 3; Muscarella 1988: 70-71 no 106-107) and those with a suspension loop at the back like at Tepe Siyalk (Ghirshman 1938-39: Pl. XXV: 2, LVI: S.589 in Tomb 15). The latter ones are identical to the example from Zagros Cemetery. Many more are unprovenanced and are part of collections of Iranian antiquities (see Calmeyer 1969: 105-108, Abb. 109; Moorey 1971: 136-137, Pl. 28 no 151; Muscarella 1988: 70-71). Although they are associated at Hasanlu and Siyalk with horse trappings and were apparently decorating straps or belts, it looks as if they were also used for personal decoration. They were not found in large numbers (as in the case of horsetrappings) and there are no horse trappings reported from tomb A12. Pendants of related shapes were also found in tombs at Kul Tarike, another Iron Age graveyard in Kurdistan, without any link to horse trappings (Rezvani & Roustaei 2007: 147, Pl. 9, 14).

Bronze Studs (Pl. 14, 16-19)

Various types of studs have been found, most of them in tomb 12A.

A collection of small, domed circular sheet bronze caps were found on the head of the deceased in tomb A12 clearly indicating that they once decorated a cap or scarf. The studs have a small loop at the back (Pl. 19). Similar smaller buttons/caps are present on many Iron Age sites in W-Iran (Muscarella 1988: 22, 72-74, 78-79; Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 63, fig. 22). At the Iron Age cemetery of Masjed-e Kabud in Tabriz, a row of such caps was discovered around the skull, as if they had been sewn on a band or on the rim of a headdress (Azarnoush & Helwing 2005: 218-220, fig. 44-45). Similar domed caps were also mounted on shell beads (Pl. 17, 38) and large Lambis shells (Pl. 16, see infra). Others with a flat rim around the domed centre have a small hole in the centre with a rivet (Pl. 18). Larger ones with a diameter of 10 to 15 cm. are often considered to be cymbals (Moorey 1971: 246-251, Pl. 72-73; Marlik Tepe, see Negahban 1996: 181-182, 313-314, Pl. 92 no 437, Pl. 140 no 979-981; for late, probably post-Achaemenid examples, see Fukai & Sono 1968: Pl. LXXVII no 9-10), though they might also have decorated clothing. Smaller specimens were e.g. found in an Iron Age context at Hasanlu where they were mounted on a furniture leg (Muscarella 1988: 22). In tomb A12 these studs decorated the centre of the large Lambis shells (Pl. 16, a detached specimen is visible just above the lower shell on Pl. 18).
Somewhat heavier and larger are cast circular studs with a protruding centre and loop at the back (Pl. 18). On Pl. 13 and 18 one can see that at least one has a squarish protuberance at the back that has four perforations at right angles to each other instead of a loop. Such buttons are typically used at the crossing of straps. It was found on the chest of the deceased. Some of these heavier studs have open worked decoration or are embellished with knobs and rope-like bands around the edge. These objects are usually associated with the headstall of horses but may have decorated other items as well since we have no indication that horse gear was present in the tomb. They are known from NW- and W-Iranian Iron Age sites such as Hasanlu (de Schauensee & Dyson 1983: 63-67; de Schauensee 1989: 41-42, fig. 7-8), Baba Jan (Goff 1969: 125, fig. 7) and War Kabud (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 54-55, fig. 19 n° 1-5). At Siyalk VI some studs with squarish protuberance but without the protruding centre were found in Tomb 15 (Ghirshman 1939: Pl. LVI, S.601 & S.794).

Bronze bracelets (Pl. 15, 33, 36)

Some 15 bronze bracelets were found mainly in the richer tombs A6, A10 and A12. Tombs A14 and A15 each contained one bronze example. A decorated silver bracelet was found in tomb A12. Only one iron bracelet was discovered (tomb C2).

Most are simple cast bronze bracelets with open, touching or overlapping ends, two from tomb A12 — including the unique silver one with incised decoration — are spiral shaped. The pictures of tomb A12 demonstrate that on each wrist, two of these cast bracelets were combined with a sheet-metal bracelet (Pl. 13-14). Such sheet metal bracelets are usually decorated with engravings or punched patterns. If present, these will become apparent after cleaning.

Bronze spearhead (Pl. 33)

Only one bronze spearhead is reported. It was discovered in tomb A1, is about 25 cm long and was cast in one piece. It is of a simple type, has a short circular stem of about half the length of the blade and a short quadrangular tang. Bronze spearheads are exceptional in the Iron Age III.

Bronze miscellanea (Pl. 19, 35)

Amongst the bronze varia found in tomb A12 we can cite tweezers (cfr. Siyalk VI: Ghirshman 1939: Pl. XCIII: S 1443), an openwork rattle bell or pendant which was found on the chest of the person (Pl. 13), as well as various types of pendants (one coiled and spool-shaped and the other one egg-shaped with a loop on top). There were also some simple pins and needles (Pl. 35).
BI-METALLIC OBJECTS

Several sets of bi-metallic pins were found (Pl. 17, 35). They combine bronze heads with a simple iron shank. Two sizes are present. The smaller ones are ca. 20 cm long (four were found in tomb A12, see Pl. 12), the larger ones (8 examples: sets of two in tombs A9, A12, A14 and B1).

Comparable pins were found at Surkh-i Dum and Chugale (Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989: 268, Pl. 167). As visible on the drawing and photographs of tomb A12 two smaller ones were found along either side of the smaller skeleton (Pl. 12), with the sharp points facing up. A large and a smaller one were found on the left side, at waist and chest height of the adult individual. They were equally lying with the point facing up. It is well probable that the second pair was originally lying on the right side but was displaced when the corpse of the child was placed in the same tomb. On the sketch of the tomb these two are indicated in the disturbed area, together with several other objects, further down on the right side (fig. 2). Whether these pins were for fastening a garment or a shroud is not clear. Michelle Marcus (1994: 3-4) states that at Hasanlu, the larger pins (14 to 36 cm long) were often discovered in pairs. They were exclusively found in graves and were used as shroud pins. The same phenomenon seems to be present in the Sanandaj “Zagros Cemetery”.

IRON OBJECTS

The number of iron objects in the “Zagros Cemetery” is rather limited. In tomb A9 there was one iron blade; tomb A11 contained two simple blades and an arrowhead. Several iron objects were found in tomb C2, they include a bracelet (see supra), two needles and a pin, as well as some iron beads and two or three sheet metal rings. The excavations in Pusht-i Kuh, Luristan, demonstrated that iron was popular for jewellery during the early Iron Age but became rarely used for jewellery once the material became less valuable. Iron bracelets were exceptional in the Iron Age III and may possibly have been heirlooms. Iron finger rings are also present in the Pusht-i Kuh Iron Age IB and II tombs, but are completely absent in the Iron Age III (Overlaet 2003: 195-197, 210-211, 236-238, fig. 162, 177; 2005).

Only two socketed spearheads were found, one in tomb A2, the other in A6. They are slightly different in shape with one of them having a more pronounced leaf-shaped blade (Pl. 33). Both have probably a folded socket and a widening slit near their base. Iron socketed spearheads are quite common in late Iron Age II and throughout Iron Age III. They are present
at Hasanlu IV (Muscarella 1989: 26, fig. 2a), at Dinkha Tepe (Muscarella 1974: 72-74, fig. 48), at Tepe Siyalk (Ghirshman 1939: Pl. LVII, LXVIII, XCII) and at Surkh-i Dum (Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989: 257-258, Pl. 177d). Also in Pusht-i Kuh several were found at Djub-i Gauhar (Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 26-27, ill. 12), at War Kabud (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 47, fig. 14), and at other sites as well, such as Bala Dasht Seh Pa and Lingah-Gauri-Tadjarian (unpublished).

SILVER

Only one silver more or less spiral-shaped bracelet was found in tomb A12 (Pl. 15, 36). It was decorated with two rectangles with incised zigzags between lines.

GOLD

Gold was apparently extremely rare since only a single bead was found in tomb A12, the by far richest tomb in the graveyard (Pl. 20). The excavators described it as “hollow”. The picture only shows one side and it may very well be a gold cap that was once mounted on a bead in another material. At War Kabud in Luristan, one of the Iron Age III tombs contained a carnelian bead with such a gold sheet cap placed on it (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 75, 78, Pl. XXIV).

MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS

Beads (Pl. 19-21, 37-40)

Beads were made of a variety of materials and in most tombs some were apparently present. The largest number was found in tomb B2. There are at present no details on shapes or on quantification available. The configuration and position of the stringed beads should also be considered with caution. The full excavation documents need to be studied to establish whether some may have been sewn on clothing items, or may belong to one or more different strings. On some plates, however, one can notice beads in their original position, indicating that in some cases they clearly did belong together (Pl. 13, 18, tomb A12).

Carnelian, agate, black stone, frit and faience, glass and bronze were commonly used for beads. At least one iron cylindrical bead is also among the finds (Pl. 20). One bead of sheet gold was found in tomb A12. As discussed above, it is not clear whether this is a complete bead or simply a cap that was...
placed on a bead made of another material. Shell was also widely used. There are cowries with cut of dorsum as well as *Engina mendicaria* (Pl. 38) and some beads made of larger shells (complete *Conus*, and *Conus* discs, Pl. 38, see infra). The large number of small disc-like beads on Pl. 40 may also be made of shell, but it is also possible that they are made of bone, limestone or faience. An analysis is needed. One string of beads consists apparently entirely out of blue frit cylindrical and disc-shaped beads (Pl. 39).

Among the less ordinary shapes worth mentioning are some spacer beads in bronze (Pl. 39) or faience (Pl. 40) and one large six-facetted carnelian bead from tomb A12 (Pl. 20). Such six-facetted beads, usually about 3 cm long, have in most cases incised longitudinal lines emphasizing their facets. They are characteristic for the Iron Age in Azerbaidjan, Armenia and Georgia, although a single specimen was also found there in a Late Bronze Age context (Akhvlediani 2001: 273-276, Fig. 2-2). Three specimens were excavated in the Iron Age Tomb 26 and a complete necklace with 15 such beads in tomb 50 at Marlik Tepe, Gilan province (Negahban 1996: 152, 165, Pl. 60 n° 220, 80 n° 338). They were also discovered, along with several variations on the type, in the 14th-13th century Middle Assyrian Tomb 45 at Assur (Haller 1954: 143, 146, Pl. 28b, 34b-d, 36f; Harper, Klenge-Brandt, Aruz & Benzel, eds., 1995: 94, cat. n° 56, Pl. 10). A unique miniature specimen of only about 1 cm long (an heirloom?) was among the beads that were discovered with an early Sasanian burial in a re-used Bronze Age tomb at Mehr War Kabud in Luristan (Haerinck & Overlaet 2010: 43, Pl. XII).

Unusual also are some small bronze “flower” shaped pendants that are sometimes integrated in necklaces (Pl. 20, 21), although some may have been found separately (Pl. 19). They consist of folded sheet bronze “flowers”, pierced by a bronze strip that is folded into a loop. Similar pendants or dangles, not to be confused with small bells since they have no clapper, are known from Hasanlu horse gear (Muscarella: 1988: 69-70, n° 105; de Schauensee & Dyson 1983: 72-73, fig. 22) and from Ghalekuti (Egami, Fukai & Masuda 1965: Tomb B-III: Pl. LXVII n° 27; Tomb C-I: Pl. LXXIV: n° 31-32).

**Shells**

Shells are quite well represented amongst the numerous beads (Pl. 20-21, 37-38, 40). It is mainly *Engina mendicaria*, *Conus* rings and *Cypraea* (cowrie with cut off dorsum) that were used. Shells beads are well represented on most Iron Age sites in NW- and W-Iran (e.g. Siyalk: Ghirshman 1939: Pl. XCV, 26; Hasanlu: Reese 1989: 81; Surkh-i Dum: Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989:...
pl. 230; several Early Iron Age sites in Pusht-i Kuh: Overlaet 2003: 224-225; and Iron Age III sites: Djub-i Gauhar: Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 37-39; War Kabud: Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 75; or at Kul Tarike Cemetery in Kurdistan: Rezvani & Roustaei 2007: 166, pl. 8). These shells are mostly coming from the waters of the Persian Gulf. On the pictures of the necklaces there can also be seen such as Conus or beads made of larger gastropods.

Several Conus whorl beads decorated with a dotted star-pattern inside a circle were found in tomb A12 (pl. 17). One specimen is also visible on pl. 38 as part of a series of beads, shells and bronze studs. Remarkable is the observation that bronze studs were mounted on them, which largely obscured their dotted decoration. The studs have small cast loops that are stuck through the perforation of the Conus whorl. It suggests that they were sewn on clothing items. Similar objects were already found in the late 4th/3rd mill. BC in Mesopotamia, but they are also attested at Uruk in a neo-Babylonian context. In Iran they are found in a late Iron II/Iron III context in Luristan Pusht-i Kuh at Darwand B, Kutal-i Gulgul (Overlaet 2003: 226, fig. 189) and at Djub-i Gauhar (Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 39, ill. 26). They also occur at Hasanlu (Reese 1989: 84-85, fig. 13 a, b & d), at Siyalk VI (Ghirshman 1939: Pl. LXXIX: 993d, Pl. XCV) and at Surkh-i Dum and Qumish (Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989: 381-382, pl. 230).

At least 4 large, oval to circular shaped Lambis shells were found together in tomb A12 on the chest/thorax of the adult (pl. 13-14, 16). These worked shells are concave with an undecorated but smoothed surface and have a drilled hole in the centre and three to four smaller holes in the mantle. A large bronze stud with a domed centre and flat rim was placed on the central perforation; smaller studs were placed on the circumferential perforations. Several of these studs were found in situ, while others had left visible impressions on the shell. In Mesopotamia similar worked shells, some of which show an incised decoration, were found in Mesopotamia in Neo-Assyrian context (Curtis 1995: 169 n° 168-170; Fiorina 2001: 163-175). In Iran undecorated examples are attested at e.g. Hasanlu (Reese 1989: 86, ill. 18), Siyalk B (Ghirshman 1939: Pl. LXIX, tomb 53 n° 955c and pl. LXX, tomb 61 n° 901a), Surkh-i Dum (Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989: pl. 225a-c, e), at Chamahzi (Haerinck & Overlaet 1998: 40, ill. 22) and at War Kabud (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 75-77, fig. 37). Most likely, these shells were mostly used for personal outfit, as is also the case in the “Zagros Cemetery”, of both men and women.
Cylinder seals (Pl. 22)

In total six cylinder seals were found, all in tomb A12. They are made of limestone and faience.

Seal n° 1: a standing archer in long tunic aiming his bow at a goat/ibex. Between them a tree of life is depicted. Faience (?)

Seal n° 2: a standing archer in long tunic shooting at a horned serpent. Between them a small tree of life is depicted. Faience.

Seal n° 3: a standing archer in a long tunic shooting at a winged caprid. The archer looks as if standing on a sledge. Faience.

Seal n° 4: a horse and caprid facing left with a wedge between them. Star with eight rays and crescent in the field. Probably limestone.

Seal n° 5: standing ostriches with spread wings following each other to the left. Faience (see e.g. Collon 1987: 79 n° 354, 84 n° 384-385; 2001: Pl. VII n° 90). An impression with the same ostriches in file was discovered at Tepe Guran (Thrane 2001: 87-88, fig. 74). Seals of a similar style usually with confronting birds or sphinxes were found at Surkh-i Dum (Schmidt, van Loon & Curvers 1989: 416, Pl. 233: 50-51), at Nurabad (Sajjadi & Samani 1999: Pl. 21 n° 4; tomb 11) and in Iron Age III graves at Gul Khanan Murdah (Haerinck & Overlaet 1999: 177, ill. 51; tomb 3) and War Kabud (Haerinck & Overlaet 2004: 78-79, fig. 38; tomb A102).

Seal n° 6: simple geometric seal/bead with cross-hatching. Faience. This type is usually considered as a cylinder seal-bead, because it is often found in association with beads. Similar seals, which are widely distributed in the Near East from the 2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC, are present at e.g. Hasanlu, Chogha Zanbil and Siyalk VI (Marcus 1989: 59 n° 13; 1996: 36-37, 107, fig. 58 n° 33). They were also found at Ghalekuti (Egami, Fukai & Masuda 1965: Tomb B-III, Pl. XXXIII n° 4, Pl. LXVII n° 17). Furthermore a similar seal was found in an Iron Age III context at Gul Khanan Murdah and in a neo-Babylonian tomb at Uruk (Boehmer, Pedde & Salje 1995: Taf. 84c1).

Numerous seals of neo-Assyrian style are known but surprisingly few can be dated accurately. Faience seals were widespread in the Near East and are to be dated from the 9th to the 7th c. BC. Amongst the faience seals common themes include archers shooting at an animal, an archer shooting at a coiled, dragon-headed snake as well as a procession of ostriches (Collon 2001: 2-3).
Michelle Marcus (1996) attributes the cylinder-seals found at Hasanlu IV to the 9th c. BC. The seals of Sanandaj “Zagros Cemetery” are best to be classified amongst her “provincial Assyrian style”. However, the seal with the archer and coiled snake, classified by Marcus (1996: 116-117, fig. 82 n° 60) as a “Central Assyrian style seal” is considered by Collon (2001: 3, 40) as an unstratified faience seal of the late 8th c. BC or later. It might be useful to repeat that R.H. Dyson and his team date the destruction of level IV at Hasanlu to around 800 BC, but this date is challenged more and more by other scholars. How it may be, as long as a complete excavation report of this major excavation is not available, it is difficult to come to an objective conclusion with only very partial evidence at hand.

Following Dominique Collon’s (2001: 2-3) classification the seals from the “Zagros Cemetery” fit into her “Syrian and Assyrian linear style” (usually made of softstone) and her “faience seals”.

It should be pointed out that a cylinder seal with a standing archer was found in tomb 8 at Nurabad together with two “kite-ware vessels” (Sajjadi & Samani 1999: Persian section, Pl. 18 n° 7). Stein discovered four similar faience and alabaster seals among the beads on the chest of a young woman in a tomb at Mauyilbak in Pish-i Kuh. The presence of Baba Djan III painted ware places this grave in the same time span (between the 9th-7th c. BC) (Stein 1940: 291-298, fig. 89-90, Pl. XVIII; Overlaet 2003: 42-44, fig. 29). Their number and their position among the beads suggest that such seals were mostly used as beads in the Zagros Mountains, rather than as functional objects.

Faience

Apart from beads and cylinder seals, faience may also have been used for a series of 4 small circular buttons and an unidentifiable element discovered in tomb B1 (Pl. 37). The 4 buttons have a central boss within a large circle and the rim consists of numerous small circles with central bosses. We have no definite information on its material but in view of their uniformity, it looks as if they were moulded which suggests that they are made of faience. R. Ghirshman in the Siyalk B cemetery (Ghirshman 1939: Pl. LV, S.796a) excavated a comparable bone (?) disc of more or less the same size.

CONCLUSION

This first report can only provide a brief outline of the cultural context of the Sanandaj Zagros graveyard. There are no known settlement remains that can at present be associated with it and the available evidence only allows a
limited number of conclusions. The pottery seems to be largely of local manufacture but fits in the general context of the known Iron Age NW- and West-Iranian grey and red ware tradition. The remainder of the burial goods similarly reflects an Iron Age context. The use of iron for jewellery and the presence of iron as well as bronze weapons indicate that the graveyard spans the transition from the Early to the Late Iron Age. Some of the richer graves contained burial goods that reflect widespread trade and contacts. Cylinder seals of the Assyrian linear-style and of faience may have been produced somewhere in eastern Iraq or in W-Iran; a bronze stud with ajour pattern could be of Transcaucasian origin. The wide range of beads and shells fit into the corpus that is known to have circulated widely in vast areas of the Near East. Some specific objects (e.g. the metal vessels such as the ink-well shaped specimen) were also shared with regions like Luristan.

Although some of the tombs might belong to the Early Iron Age, the three best documented tombs of the cemetery (tombs A6, A10 and A12) are to be dated between the 8th-6th c. BC, most probably mainly in the 7th c. BC.

Bibliography


—, 2010. Early Bronze Age graveyard to the West of the Kabir Kuh (Pusht-i Kuh, Luristan), (= Luristan Excavation Documents VIII), Acta Iranica 50, Leuven.
Pl. 1. Location of the Zagros graveyard near Sanandaj (Google Earth; photographs of 2005, before housing development and roadwork).
Pl. 2. Pictures of the excavations used in the original press releases (2008).
Pl. 3. Plan of the location of the graveyard (top) and plan of square C (bottom).
Pl. 4. Plan of trench B and square A.
Pl. 5. View of some of the closed tombs.
Pl. 6. View and drawing of the skeleton and the burial goods on grave A6.
Pl. 7. View of grave A6 during the excavations.
Pl. 9. Tomb A10: cap stones and skeleton with burial goods.
Pl. 10. Pottery from tomb A10.
Pl. 11. Grey ware vessel, bronze bowl and fibula from tomb A10.
Pl. 12. Tomb A12: cap stones and skeleton with burial goods.
Pl. 13. Tomb A12: detail of the skeleton with burial goods in situ.
Pl. 14. Tomb A12: the skull (top) and upper body of the skeleton with burial goods in situ.
Pl. 15. Bracelets and bronze bowl from tomb A12.
Pl. 16. *Lambis* shells with bronze studs from tomb A12.
Pl. 17. *Conus* whorl beads (a), bimetallic pin (b) and bronze S-shaped items (c) from tomb A12.
Pl. 18. Bronze studs from tomb A12.
Pl. 19. Various metal finds from tomb A12.
Pl. 20. Gold bead (a), carnelian oval bead (b) and strings of beads from tomb A12.
Pl. 22. Cylinder seals from tomb A12.
Pl. 23. Pottery from tombs A1, B1 and A15.
Pl. 25. Pottery from tombs A6, A10 and A11.
Pl. 27. Various vessels from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 28. Various vessels from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 29. Various vessels from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 30. Various dishes from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 31. Two vases from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 32. Various vessels from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 33. Iron weaponry, bronze spearhead and iron jewellery from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 34. Bronze vessels from tombs A6, A10 and A12.
Pl. 35. Bronze needle and bimetallic pins from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 36. Silver (a) and bronze (b-e) bracelets from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 37. Various beads and 5 faience (?) decorative elements from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 38. Various beads from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 39. Necklaces with faience (top) and carnelian and bronze beads from the Sanandaj graveyard.
Pl. 40. Necklace with faience spacer beads (inset) from the Sanandaj graveyard.