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Western Iran at the End of Fifth Millennium B.C., Change or Continuity? An Appraisal

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Abstract

The early phase of late chalcolithic period is corresponding with principal cultural changes in vast regions of west of Iran. After long time of using painted potteries, at least at the end of fifth and early fourth millennium BC overlapping with Godin VII (VII/VI3) in west of Iran, the painted ceramics style went out entirely and replaced by plain/coarse chaff tempered pottery style. The replacement of plain ceramic instead of painted one in west of Iran, is considered with great cultural changes in west Iran which an event has occurred in the Zagros region to be seen by a severe decline in the number of residential areas and functioned to bring a shift by which the sedentary societies were changed to the more mobile pastoralists using open-air or cave areas instead of large occupational sites. but noted that mentioned hypothesis regarding the archaeological studies of early phase of late chalcolithic period in west of Iran was based on early studies occurred at 1964-1975 in east of central Zagros Highlands at west of Iran. noted during recent decades the situation was changed and more investigations conducted mainly based on scientific approaches by using radiocarbon dating which resulted in challenging early mentioned hypothesis about this period. Most of thesis regarding the chronology, settlement pattern, distribution, socio-economic complexity and cultural interaction of Godin VII studies at the end of fifth and early fourth millennium BC was failed. The present paper is trying to evaluate this period based on review of archaeological studies carried out about Godin VII period during recent decades. Our studies in this article showing that Godin VII period at the end of fifth and early fourth millennium BC was one of the main period at the prehistory of west Iran that has a key role of socio-economic complexity that need more attentions.

Keywords: West of Iran, Chalcolithic Period, Godin VII, Chaff tempered Potteries.

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Introduction

In the Chalcolithic period, now broadly understood to span the fifth and fourth millennia BCE in southwest Asia, one of the most profound transformation in human history took place shifting from dispersed, small village communities into a network of urban societies. Our understanding of different regions' developments is very uneven. Even Mesopotamia, the Middle and Upper Euphrates zones, as well as the Khabur region in present-day Syria and eastern Turkey that had long been the focus of archaeological research and have produced the most detailed datasets while the Chalcolithic sequences of the western mountainous regions of Iran were established based on a series of small soundings and discrete surveys which are much less documented.

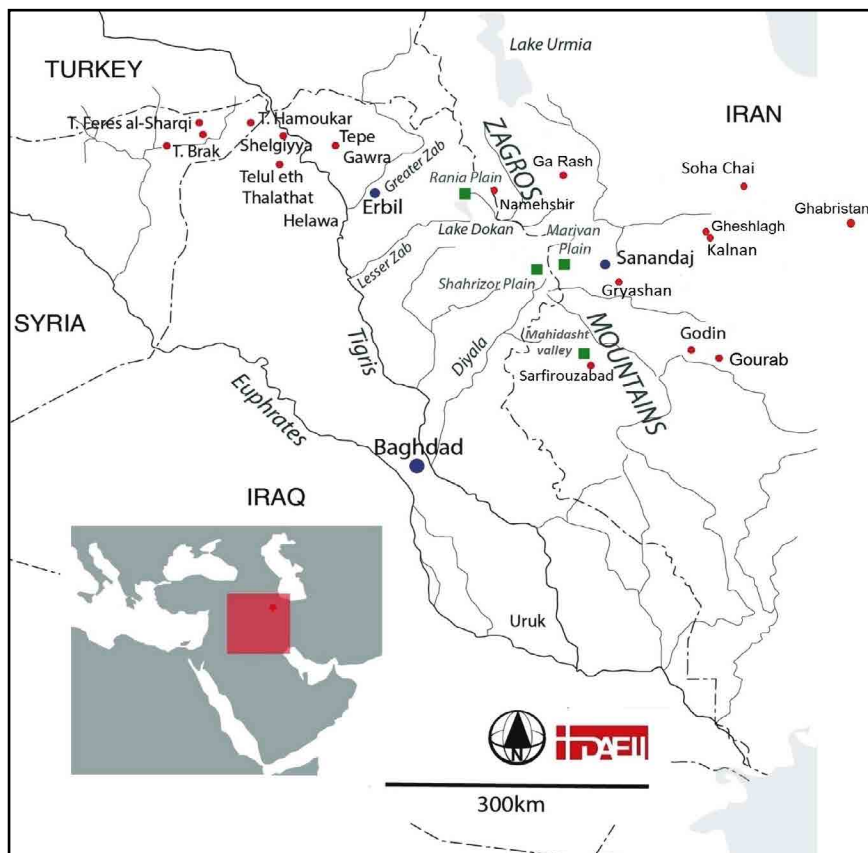
Generally speaking, on the basis of previous studies the Chalcolithic sequences of Western Iran were divided into three main separate sub periods including Early, Middle and Late phases. Even in the earlier phases of chalcolithic period western Iran, western Iran witnessed dense occupations of human settlements whereas during the Early Late Chalcolithic period started around the end of the fifth millennium BCE, it has been claimed that there has been a drastic decline in the population size and eventually in the number of settlements caused the Zagros region to have had any considerable settlement sites (Abdi, 2003: 431-433; Johnson, 1987:129-131; Wright, 1987: 145-147) and as Hole has stated (Hole, 1994: 132-134; 2011: 7); in the some valleys of the region such an event has imposed the settlements to be abandoned. In addition, according to the significant decrease in the number of permanent settlements, it has been claimed also that the Late Chalcolithic sites might be more likely converted to open-air or cave sites suggesting a shift to the more mobile pastoral way of life (Henrickson, 1989: 288). But as a result of the recent archaeological investigations carried out in the region we will challenge the issues of the two general hypotheses mentioned regarding a sudden interruption or rather instead the continuity of the Late Chalcolithic culture of western Iran. Recently there have been a number of field activities on the LC sites in western Iran are showing that at the end of fifth millennium BC, in the Zagros region there has been not only an indication of drastic decline in settlement areas but instead this area would be experienced a dense population growth. A large number of identified LC sites in western Iran are seen as relatively higher mounds (tells) seem to have concealed the solid architectural materials as well as thick cultural deposits may implying potentially as the remains of sedentary farmer villages.

Chalcolithic Period in Western Iran

The earlier phases of the Chalcolithic period in vast regions of Western Iran are characterized by two well-known pottery styles: J and Dalma wares. The so called J ware (ca. 5500-5000 B.C.) is considered as a Halaf-derived pottery which are found exclusively at the western valleys of the central Zagros areas such as Mahidasht (Henrickson, 1985; Levine & Young, 1987; Rothman & Badler 2011; Moghadam and Javanmardzadeh, 2013) whereas Dalma style (ca. 5000-4500 B.C.) was firstly identified at Dalma Tepe in Solduz valley in south of the Urmia Lake seems to have been widely spread very far from its original context to be found in any sites (Levine and Young, 1987; Henrickson, 1985). As with Dalma, Ubaid influenced Black on Buff (BOB) wares are found also in the Middle Chalcolithic period. The Middle Chalcolithic period ended with a far more ephemeral phenomena of Godin VIII tradition (Levine & Young, 1987:29) around 4200 B. C.. In contrast to the almost homogeneity of the Middle Chalcolithic pottery styles in Western Iran, the Late Chalcolithic period begins with considerable divergences in the local sequences that were initiated specifically in the eastern and western valleys of the Central Zagros Mountains. The earliest ceramic assemblages of the Late Chalcolithic in eastern valleys (e. g. Kangvar zone) is that of the diagnostic Godin VII style which has been characterized by unsmoothed, heavily chaff-tempered and often incompletely fired wares (Levine & Young, 1987: 33), (Fig. 2-5). Based on the radiocarbon dates for the Godin VII period derived from Tepe Kalnan (Saed moucheshi et al., 2017), Tepe Gheshlagh (Sharifi and Motarjem, 2018) and Soha Chai Tepe (Rahimi, 2011) in addition to the perceived relative lengths of occupation duration at Godin Tepe VII-VI: 3-1, a date of between 4100-3700 cal. BCE was proposed for this period (table 1). Period VII ceramic as known in Kangavar valley are apparently missing almost entirely in the High Road valleys located in west of Sahneh area. In Mahidasht plain at a level of Choga Maran site there have been potteries are characterized by Red White and Black Ware (RWB) which are assumed to be contemporary with period VII in Kangavar. Another painted ware is Black on Red (BOR) which is found in the same time from the Mahidasht sequence (Levine & Young, 1987:35).

As we mentioned earlier nearly all archaeologist who worked in the Iranian west maintain that at the end of the fifth millennium BC, an event has occurred in the Zagros region to be seen by a severe decline in the number of residential areas and functioned to bring a shift by which the sedentary societies were changed to the more mobile pastoralists using open-air or cave areas instead of large occupational sites. Nevertheless, as we will see

in the reminder of this article the Kangvar valley is stood as an exceptional issue where during the Godin VII period, the settlement pattern in this area is marked by an increase in the number of sites-although they were small villages (Henrickson, 1989: 288). By reviewing the different evidence, we would propose that as the archaeological results from the Zagros region indicate nearly all valleys in western Iran have the similar pattern as the same as Kangavar represented during Late Chalcolithic period. The most important pottery style of early late chalcolithic period which influenced large regions of western Iran is Godin VII (Fig. 1).



◀ Fig. 1: Map of Iran showing the location of mentioned late chalcolithic period sites of West Iran and main ones in neighboring areas (Author, 2020).

Godin VII

Godin VII period (VII/VI3) named Godin VII hereafter in this paper become well known in the prehistory of west of Iran after 2 season of archaeological excavations at Godin Tepe carried out by Royal Ontario Museum expedition around 1964-1975. Godin VII period considered as a first phase of late chalcolithic coming after middle chalcolithic deposits of Godin Tepe (Godin X-VIII) characterized by disappearance of painted ceramics and replacement of plain chaff tempered of Godin VII style (Young, 1965: 3; Young and Levine, 1974: 12). Period Godin VII forms a break with the previous periods based on the disappearance of painted

wares and an orientation toward the central Iranian Plateau. The distinct plain, chaff-tempered wares consist mainly of coarse ware (smoothed and unsmoothed) basins with finger-impressed lug handles; red-slipped ware goblets, trays, and open jars with molded zigzag decoration on the outside of the rim; and buff fine wares (sometimes white-slipped) for hemispherical bowls, shallow bowls, and sinuous-walled goblets (Levine & Young, 1987: Fig. 16), (Fig. 2-5). Even the Godin VII tradition was first identified at the eastern valleys of Central Zagros, but as discussed in un the following a large region of western Iran influenced by this pottery style.

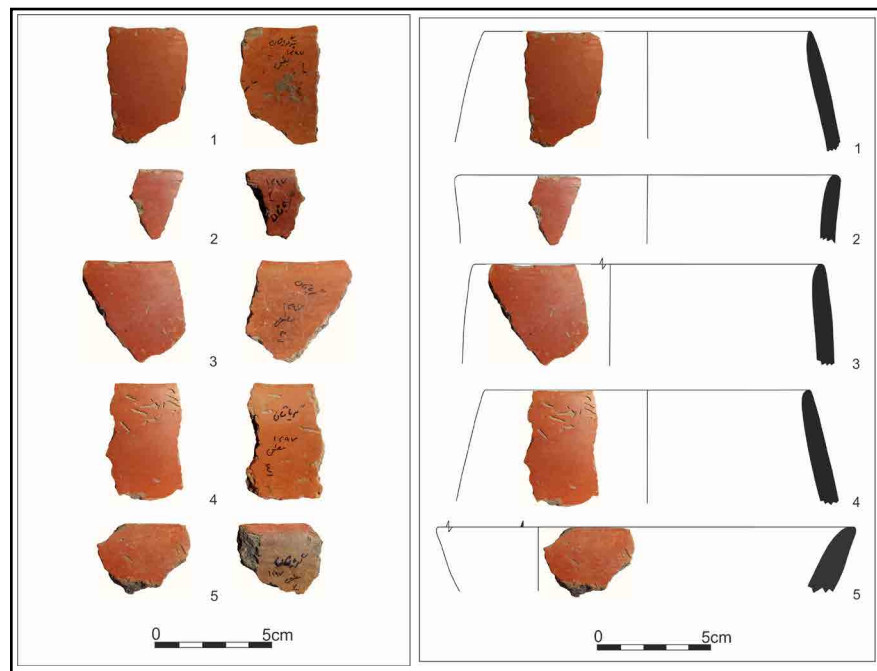


Fig. 2: Godin VII Red-Slipped pottery from Tepe Gryashan, Sanandaj is region (Zaeri et al., 2016: Fig. 14). ►

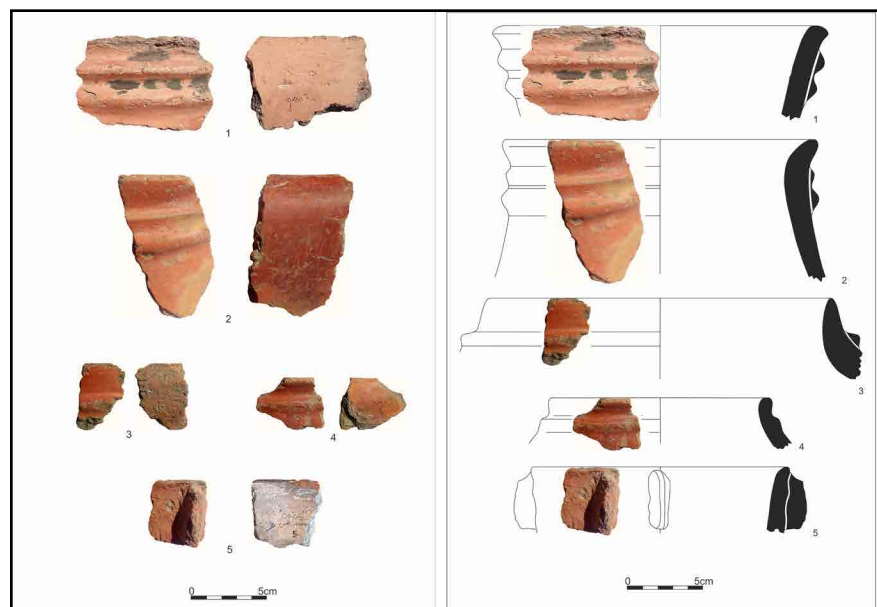
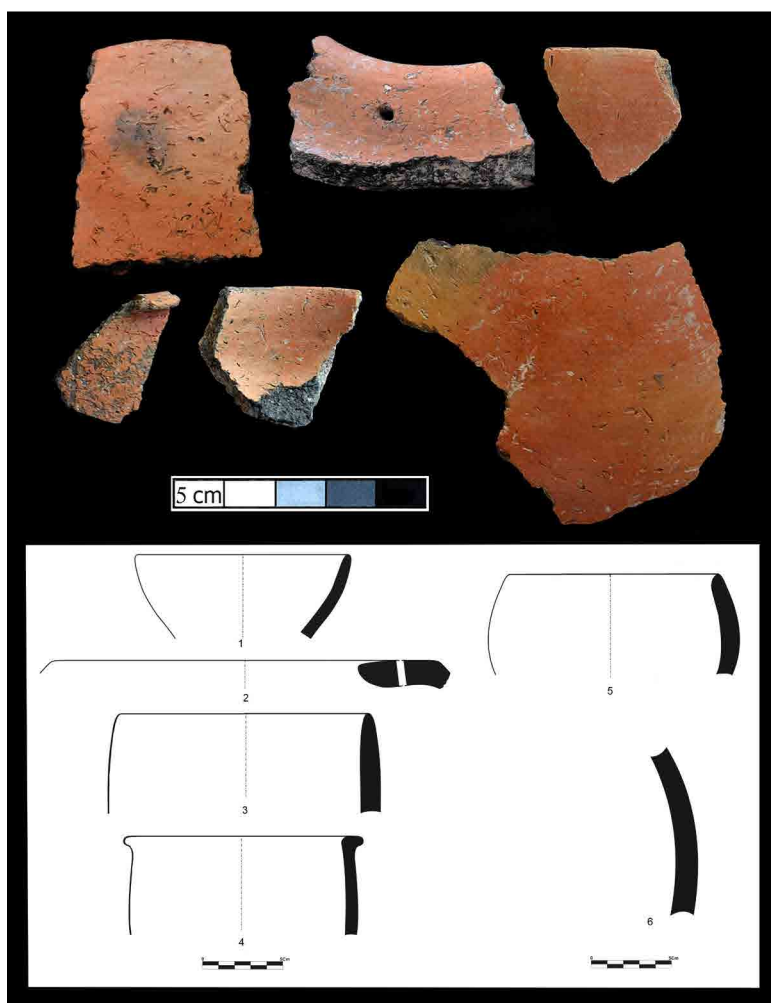


Fig. 3: Different group of Godin VII pottery from Tepe Gryashan, Sanandaj (photo: Author, 2020). ►



◀ Fig. 4: Detailed of Godin VII pottery style (1: Tepe Gryashan (photo: Author, 2020). 2-3: Tepe Garash, Saqez region (Ahmadinia et al., 2018: 68).



◀ Fig. 5: Godin VII ceramic from Tepe Namashir, Baneh region (photo: Morteza Zamani Dadaneh, 2020).

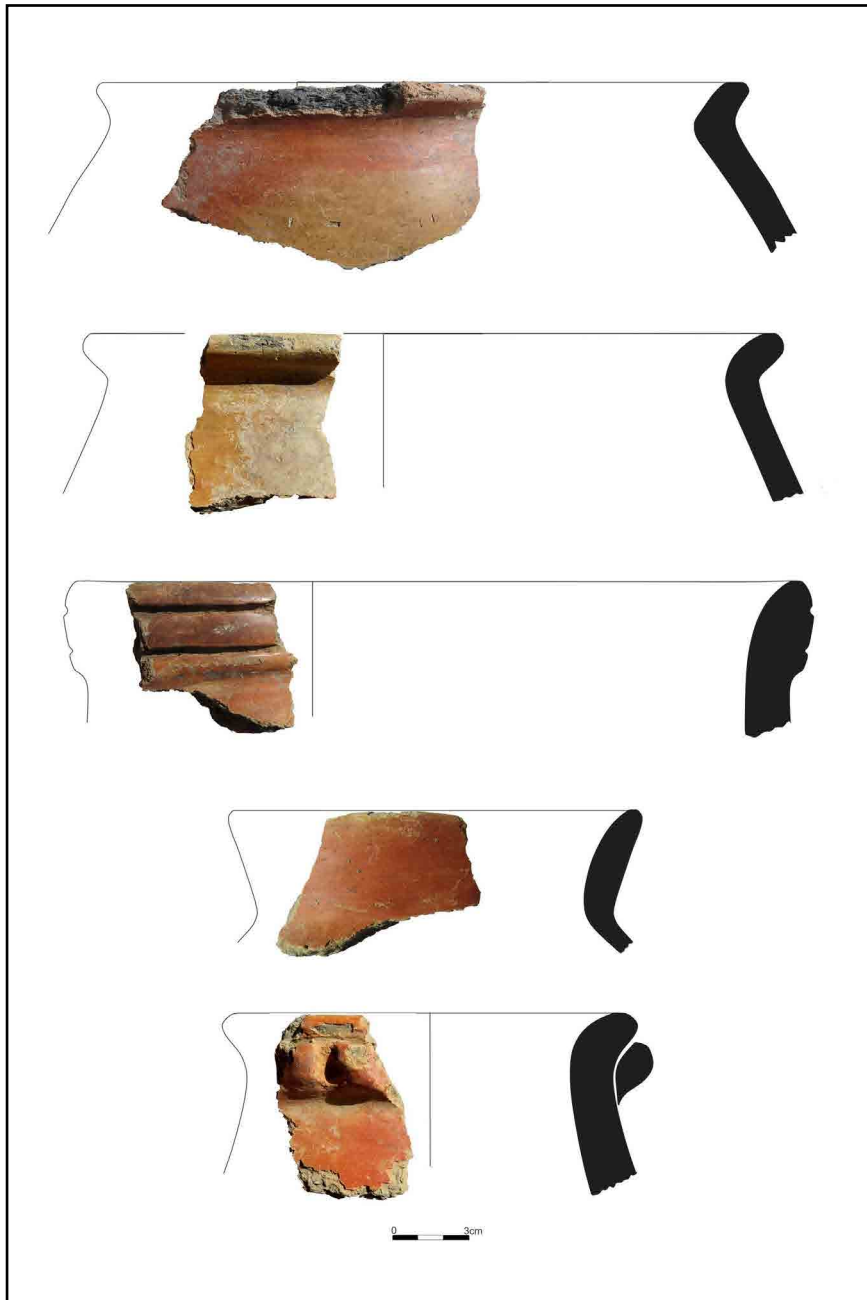
Table 1: chronology of Godin VII period in central Zagros (Renette & Mohammadi Ghasrlian, 2020). ▼

	Central Iranian Plateau	Northern Zagros	Eastern central Zagros	Western Central Zagros	Mesopotamia
3000	Early Bronze Age	Kura-Araxes	Kura-Araxes	Godin VII-VI	Early Bronze Age
3200	Late Chalcolithic		Godin VI		LC 5
3400		Chaff-faced ware			Godin VII
3600	Early Chalcolithic		Seh Gabi		
3800		Pisdeli			Maran
4000	Dalma		Siahbid	LC 1	
4200		Hajji Firuz		Shahnabad	J ware
4400	Transitional Chalcolithic		Late Neolithic		
4600					
4800					
5000					
5200					

Continuity or Change as Seen from Settlement Pattern

As noted, one of the most well-known Early Late Chalcolithic pottery styles of terminal fifth millennium BC is Godin VII tradition which are presented nearly in the all valleys of western Iran except Mahidasht valley. The most northern well known site possessing Godin VII cultural characteristics in western Iran is Tepe Nameshir located in Baneh county, north-west of Kurdistan province (Saed Moucheshi et al., 2017: Fig. 8), (Fig. 5). Godin VII pottery has been reported also from Tepe Garash in Saqez region recently (Ahmadinia et al., 2018: 68), (Fig. 6). Moreover, there exist a handful of fieldwork reports mainly by the Iranians pointing to a wider expansion of Godin VII ceramics across the western Iran, e.g. Marivan (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2001), Tepe Kalnan (Saed Moucheshi et al., 2011), Tepe Gheshlagh in Bijar region (Sharifi and Motarjem 2018), Sanandaj (Zarehi et al., 2017; Mohammadi Ghasrain et al., 2019), Qorveh plain (Sharifi and Zeynivand, 2018), Ziwieh (Mohammadi Ghasrlian and Hozhabri, 2017) and Karaftou (Jahangiri and Ahmadinia, 2018:257). Nearly all regions of Kurdistan province in west of Iran such as Baneh, Marivan, Sanandaj, Bijar, Ziwieh, Qorveh and Karaftou were dominated by Godin VII pottery style.

Godin VII ceramic was reported also from Soha Chai tepe excavation (Rahimi et al., 2016) and by Abharroud basin surveys in Zanjan area (Alibaigi et al., 2012; Khosrawi et al., 2013). In addition to Kurdistan



◀ Fig. 6: Godin VII pottery from tepe Garash, Saqez region (Ahmadinia et al., 2018: 68).

and Zanjan, almost all eastern valleys of Kermanshah including Sahneh (Mohammadifar and Motarjem, 2003), Harsin (Motarjem and Mohammadifar, 2002), Sonqor (Heydarian and Ghorbani, 2016:24) and Kangvar (Young, 1975: 192) are seen to have been influenced by Godin VII traditions. The same culture also was extended southern ward to reach Asadabad, Nehavand (Young, 1961) and Hamedan (Balmaki, 2013) and even toward southernmost into Luristan (Goff, 1971; Henrickson, 1994). Beside the Iranian west, the cultural realm of Godin VII tradition also has

been to affect the Central Plateau of this country, i. e. those Plume ware of Tepe Ghabriştan (Ghabriştan I) (Majidzadeh, 1978: 96; 1981: 143) is supposed to be influenced by Godin VII.

In the areas such as Kangavar valley (Young, 1975: 192; Henrickson, 1994: 92) Sanandaj (Zarehi et al., 2016), Songhor (Heydarian and Ghorbani, 2016: 24), Marivan (Zamain Dadaneh et al., 2019: 39-40), Qorveh (Sharifi and Zeynivand, 2018: 736) and Karaftou (Jahangiri and Ahmadiania, 2018: 257), most of the findings were classified as being made during LC period.

Apart from the LC sites abundances in the study area there is evidence of structural component of many sites to be used as indication for sedentary life. A number of Godin VII period's site as discussed in the following have been dug out recently and yielded so many building materials, remains of upstanding mud brick walls as well as thick cultural deposits. Tepe Geshlagh is located in the center of Talvar valley in Bijar County. Three season of salvage excavation carried out at the site have revealed significance information from the late Neolithic to Iron Age along with solid Godin VII deposits and architecture (Sharifi and Motarjem, 2018: 88-89). Sites containing relatively firm architectural materials were also reported from Tepe Soha Chai (Rahimi Sakhoni, 2011), Tepe Nameshir of the little Zab area (Saed Muocheshi et al., 2017) and Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshah (Alibaigi et al., 2017) all sites were filled up by Godin VII deposits.

Conclusion

We briefly reviewed three theories relating to the terminal fifth millennium BC in western Iran. They stated that:

- At the end of the fifth millennium BC a drastic decline of settlements were occurred in the Zagros through which many sites were abandoned (Hole, 1994; 2011; Abdi, 2003).

- Late Chalcolithic sites were converted to open-air or cave sites so that the subsistent strategies of the region were also shifted to mobile pastoralism way of life (Henrickson, 1989: 288).

- Late Chalcolithic (Godin VII) ceramic as known from the Kangavar valley are apparently missing almost entirely in the High Rod valleys (west of Sahneh area) (Levine and Young, 1987: 35).

While in the text we draw our attention on the issues that would potentially be used to criticize the abovementioned theories.

On the basis of recently found evidence from different fieldworks we challenged the issue stressing a sharp decrease of the settlements number

in the Zagros region. In contrary to aforementioned concepts we argued that at the end of the fifth millennium BC, Godin VII tradition covered vast areas of western Iran. All valleys from the Little Zab basin in the north west of Kurdistan to the eastern valley of Central Zagros represent plain/coarse Godin VII diagnostic ceramic types. Godin VII horizon also extended to the western edge of Central Plateau of Iran and many sites in Qazvin plain like Tepe Ghabristan (Qabristan I) demonstrates Red slipped Godin VII ceramics. As many of the Ghabristan periods highly mounded occupational sites of the region indicate it would be reasonable to infer that the Earlier Chalcolithic traditions of the region (Dalma culture) has more likely continued until the subsequent Godin VII evolved since rationally no hiatus of any kinds are visible between them. Such an approach would be in accordance with Renette (Renette, 2018: 325-326) observation in Mahidasht plain and would enforce the assumption that although the number of LC sites increased in other valleys of western Iran but as Mahidasht they represent any changes visible between the Middle and Late Chalcolithic periods.

In addition, we argued that most of the Godin VII cultural layer in the study area represented solid architectural remains as the representative of housing structures for sedentary people while the pastoralist seasonal or temporary camps are generally relatively small in size and were built with no durable materials. Further, such a camp conventionally is seen to be located dispersedly on the high latitude spaces for animals foraging. To convince, there is another data approach to support dissuasion become available from a settlement pattern study of Sarfirouzabad area of Kermanshah as part of Zagros region (Niknami and Askarpour, 2015). Regional study and locational analysis carried out on the distribution pattern of different prehistoric sites shed more light on the patterning of the Late Chalcolithic sites. There have been more than 60 LC site in different size that all of which carried pottery types resembling Godin VII ceramic assemblages. What important to say here that is related to the size and location of each LC site where the larger sites tended to be clustered around Merak River direction across the flood plain while the smaller ones towards occupying elevated places. This observation would be in the same line of criticism we postulated against the underling theory in the course of settlements decline.

Finally, the statement that “Godin VII traditions are apparently missing almost entirely in the High Road...” could also be challenged by the findings reported from the Taq-e Bostan site excavation which has been located at the same area.

Godin VII cultural period (ca. 4100-3700 BC) is somewhat overlapped with LC2/LC3 of Upper Mesopotamia and Early Uruk period in south. In this period, the first urban center was formed in Mesopotamia. In the western Iran also, after existing a long time period of simple villager societies, at least at the end of 5th millennium BC the first evidences of emerging complex hierarchical communities was documented. This trend was started in Godin VII period and reached to its maximum level at the end of 4th millennium BC (Godin VI) but did not experience the complete urbanization development. The presence of thick-walled building at the Seh Gabi mound A, indicates some social changes in Kangavar plain in Godin VII period dating to LC2 period of Upper Mesopotamia (Rothman and Badler, 2011: 80). This building in Seh Gabi is characterized to have eight rooms to be used as places for pottery, sickle blades, stone beds, textile and clay figurines production and metal working. Some of finds as seals and clay sealings object from there points to the fact that the mound A of Seh Gabi site near Godin was part of a system evolving toward more complex organization, possibly with Godin as a center at the end of fifth millennium BC. Existence of such a social system in Kangavar implies for the geographical and societal centralization development in this part of the Zagros region (Rothman and Badler, 2011). Beside architectural evidence from Godin VII period, the seals and sealings of this period also showing more interactions with neighboring areas and particularly with the sites located in Upper Mesopotamia such as Gwara XIA (Henrickson, 1988: 10-12). Remarkably instead of the proposed drastic cultural changes with the beginning of the Late Chalcolithic period, it can be seen that at the end of the fifth millennium BC in western Iran, the first sign of socio-economic complexity, Craft Specialization, hierarchical societies and initial administrative systems were emerged and gradually were improved.

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بازنگری مطالعات اواخر هزاره پنجم پیش از میلاد در غرب ایران، تغییر تا تداوم فرهنگی؟

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چکیده

در مراحل آغازین دوره مس‌وسنگ جدید در بخش‌هایی از غرب ایران در اواخر هزاره پنجم پیش از میلاد، نظریاتی ارائه شده که براساس آن محوطه‌های استقرار زیادی از غرب ایران با شروع این دوره خالی از سکنه شده و شاهد تغییر سیستم زندگی از کشاورزی به کوچ‌نشینی و تهی شدن دشت‌ها و دره‌های این مناطق و پناه بردن ساکنین به ارتفاعات هستیم؛ اما بازنگری مطالعات صورت‌گرفته نشان می‌دهد که چنین نظریه‌ای نمی‌تواند درست باشد. بررسی و مطالعات اخیر محوطه‌های دوره مس‌وسنگ جدید برخی مناطق غرب ایران نشان می‌دهد که نه تنها با شروع این دوره شاهد کاسته شدن جمعیت نیستیم، بلکه بلعکس مرحله جدیدی از شکوفایی فرهنگی و افزایش جمعیت رخ می‌دهد. علاوه بر نظریات ارائه شده، سایر مقولات باستان‌شناسی این دوره نظیر مباحث مربوط به چگونگی الگوی استقرار محوطه‌ها، گاهنگاری، نوع شواهد سفالین و... بر پایه شواهد قدیمی بوده و با شواهد امروزی همخوان نیستند و نیاز به بازنگری دارند؛ در نتیجه، مقاله حاضر سعی دارد که با برشمردن ویژگی‌های یکی از مهم‌ترین فرهنگ‌های سفالی این دوره به نام «فرهنگ گودین VII» نظریات ارائه شده را به چالش بکشد. بررسی و مطالعه محوطه‌های این دوره نشان می‌دهد که با شروع دوره مس‌وسنگ جدید فرهنگ‌ها نه تنها دچار زوال نمی‌شوند، بلکه بلعکس شاهد شروع نوعی پیچیدگی و توسعه در جوامع هستیم. علاوه بر این برخلاف برخی مباحث گذشته در مورد این سنت فرهنگی، دامنه پراکنش این فرهنگ مختص به بخش‌های شرق زاگرس مرکزی نیست و بخش‌های وسیع‌تری از مناطق غرب ایران نظیر منطقه کردستان در شمال زاگرس مرکزی نیز در این قلمرو قرار دارند. لازم به ذکر است که دوره مدنظر در این نوشتار، هم‌زمان است با دوره مهم سپیده‌دم شهرنشینی در بین‌النهرین و از این منظر نیاز به بررسی و مطالعات بیشتری در آینده احساس می‌گردد.

کلیدواژگان: غرب ایران، دوره مس‌وسنگ، گودین VII، سفال با آمیزه کاه.

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