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Tepe Anouj of Malayer The Key Site in East of Central Zagros, Iran

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Abstract

Tepe Anouj (locally known as Qaleh Bolandeh) is situated in a village of the same name in the county of Malayer, Hamadan Province, and represents one of the key archaeological sites in the eastern Central Zagros. Archaeological research at the mound was carried out in 2018 and identified various cultural occupation periods from the Middle Chalcolithic to the Middle and Late Islamic periods. However, no evidence was recovered for several intermediate cultural periods, including Iron Ages I and II, as well as the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Sasanian, and early Islamic periods. The gathering of cultural data involved fieldwork activities such as archaeological excavation and survey. Additional information was obtained from published sources and existing reports. Ultimately, the cultural sequences of different periods at the site were systematically examined and analyzed. The primary research question guiding this study is as follows: What is the stratigraphic sequence at Tepe Anouj, and which cultural periods does it include? The results of this research indicate that evidence of occupation and various cultural periods has been identified at the site, including the Middle and Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age (Godin IV or Yanik), Middle and Late Bronze Age (Godin III), Median (Iron Age III), Parthian, Ilkhanid, and Qajar periods. The findings of this excavation not only clarify the chronology of occupation at Tepe Anouj but also demonstrate that the site has significant potential to contribute to a better understanding of regional cultural developments, as it contains discontinuous yet long-term evidence of occupation spanning from prehistory to the Islamic period.

Keywords: Western Iran, Central Zagros, Malayer, Tepe Anouj, Salvage Excavation, Stratigraphy, Pottery, Typology.



Introduction

Tepe Anouj, known locally as Qaleh Bolandeh, is one of the most important archaeological sites located to the east of Anouj village in Malayer County, Hamadan Province. Due to its strategic geographical position at the transitional boundary between the southern part of Hamadan Province and the Silakhor Plain (Lurestan Province), the site has long played a significant role in regional cultural and commercial interactions. Based on surface evidence and the architectural remains of a castle on the mound, occupation at the site spans from prehistory to the late Islamic period (Safavid and Qajar). Archaeological excavations at the site, particularly the salvage excavation conducted in 2018 on the northern side of the mound, together with systematic surface surveys, have provided valuable data regarding its stratigraphy and cultural sequence. The pottery and architectural remains recovered from this excavation indicate a discontinuous yet recurrent pattern of occupation from the Middle Chalcolithic to the late Islamic centuries and allow for comparative analysis with other sites in the eastern Central Zagros. This research was designed with the overall aim of clarifying the chronological and cultural context of Tepe Anouj, using a descriptive-comparative method based on data obtained from stratigraphic excavation and surface survey of the site. Accordingly, the operational objectives of the research were as follows: to determine the chronological sequence of occupation at Tepe Anouj and identify its temporal range; to compare material culture data (pottery) with other sites in order to understand cultural connections and regional chronology; and to provide a more precise framework for the relative chronology of the site based on archaeological evidence. The findings of this research indicate that occupation at Tepe Anouj occurred intermittently from the Middle Chalcolithic to the Qajar period. The significance of this research lies not only in clarifying the occupation history of Tepe Anouj but also in providing a foundation for broader studies on cultural interactions between the Iranian Central Plateau and the Central Zagros. Given its location in the southern part of Hamadan Province, adjacent to the communication corridor towards Borujerd and the Silakhor Plain, as well as its connection to the plain leading to the slopes of Mount Garin (Nahavand and Kangavar), Tepe Anouj is considered a key site for archaeological research. This study can also serve as a basis for future research and conservation planning for this valuable site.

Research Method

The nature of the present research is fundamental, employing a descriptive-

comparative approach designed to analyze and interpret the archaeological data from Tepe Anouj. Data collection in this study is based on two main methods: fieldwork and library-based and comparative studies. By integrating field data (including stratigraphy and surface survey) with comparative studies, this research seeks to establish the chronology, outline the cultural sequence, and understand intra-site developments at Tepe Anouj. The findings of this research not only enrich the archaeological knowledge of the region but also provide essential foundational data for the design of future research and informed decision-making regarding the preservation of the site. The data for this research were collected through salvage excavation and stratigraphic investigation at Tepe Anouj, conducted in 2018. The site was in a critical condition, with collapses occurring in the detached northern and northeastern parts (Areas A and B). To rescue these endangered areas, salvage operations and complete documentation (including excavation, photography, and stratigraphic section drawing) were carried out as a first step, with the aim of preserving archaeological information prior to its complete destruction. The objectives of this excavation were to document the cultural layers, determine the chronological sequence, and carry out the salvage of these parts. Following the completion of excavation and data recovery, and to address immediate hazards and ensure safety, the loose and unstable sediment volumes in these areas were removed and reduced to achieve a stable slope. The debris resulting from this operation were then deposited and compacted at the base of these stabilized slopes to serve as a protective barrier against further erosion. To better understand the cultural position of Tepe Anouj, the data obtained from this excavation were compared with findings from contemporary and similar sites in the Central Zagros. This comparison was conducted through the examination of written sources, archaeological reports, and previous research, and it contributes to the analysis of cultural and chronological similarities and differences between Tepe Anouj and neighboring regions.

Research Background

Tepe Anouj was first registered in the National Heritage List of Iran on 14 March 1975, under registration number 1093 ([Encyclopedia of the History of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran, 2019](#)). The site was subsequently re-surveyed during archaeological surveys of the Samen district of Malayer County in 2008, directed by Zabihollah Bakhtiari. In that survey, only potsherds from various periods of the Bronze Age (Early, Middle, and Late) were reported from the site ([Bakhtiari, 2008: 296](#)).

Finally, in 2012, the core zone of the site was delimited, and a protective buffer zone was proposed (Bakhtiari, 2012). In recent years, sediment removal for fertilizing agricultural lands, the use of soil from the mound for construction purposes, and the creation of access routes to certain neighborhoods and alleys of Anouj village have caused parts of the main core of the mound to become detached, thereby posing serious risks to the safety of local residents. Consequently, with the decision of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Hamadan Province and the formal approval of the Institute of Cultural and Archaeological Research (ICAR), it was determined that the site would undergo salvage excavation in the detached part (the purpose of salvage in these parts was, in effect, to mitigate documented hazards). Accordingly, it was decided that the fieldwork team would, while mitigating hazards in this part of the site, establish stratigraphic and study trenches using scaffolding; to achieve this, scaffolding without buttresses or locking mechanisms was erected to a height of 12 meters, representing an extremely difficult and hazardous operation adjacent to the aforementioned part, in order to identify the stratigraphic sequence of these areas and ultimately mitigate hazards to a specified height.

Geological location and Environmental Condition

Malayer is located in the southern part of Hamadan Province. The Samen district lies to the southwest of the city of Malayer, within which the studied site is situated. This district is bounded to the north by the city of Malayer, to the south by Lurestan Province (including the Sefid-kuh heights) and Borujerd County, to the east by the Zand and Central districts, and to the west by Nahavand County. The Samen district has a lowland and piedmont setting and is, in terms of climate, classified as mountainous. Among the most important water resources of this region are seasonal rivers, springs, and a number of dug qanats. Samen is located on the communication route between Malayer and Borujerd, and between Malayer and Nahavand (Khaksar, 2008). Tepe Anouj is located in a village of the same name, approximately 40 km from the city of Malayer and 25 km south of the Samen plain, adjacent to the communication road connecting Nahavand to Malayer and Borujerd. The village is bounded to the north by the Samen plain and to the south by the Sefid-kuh heights. Tepe Anouj, with its circular base, is situated at 34°06'28.6" N latitude and 48°34'03.2" E longitude, on the eastern edge of Anouj village (Figs 1, 2). The mound rises 21 m above the surrounding ground level, measures 110 m in length and 93 m in width and covers an area of approximately 10,230 m². A considerable portion of

this mound has been levelled as a result of residential construction, and at present, houses surround the mound on all sides (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 19) (Figs 3, 4).

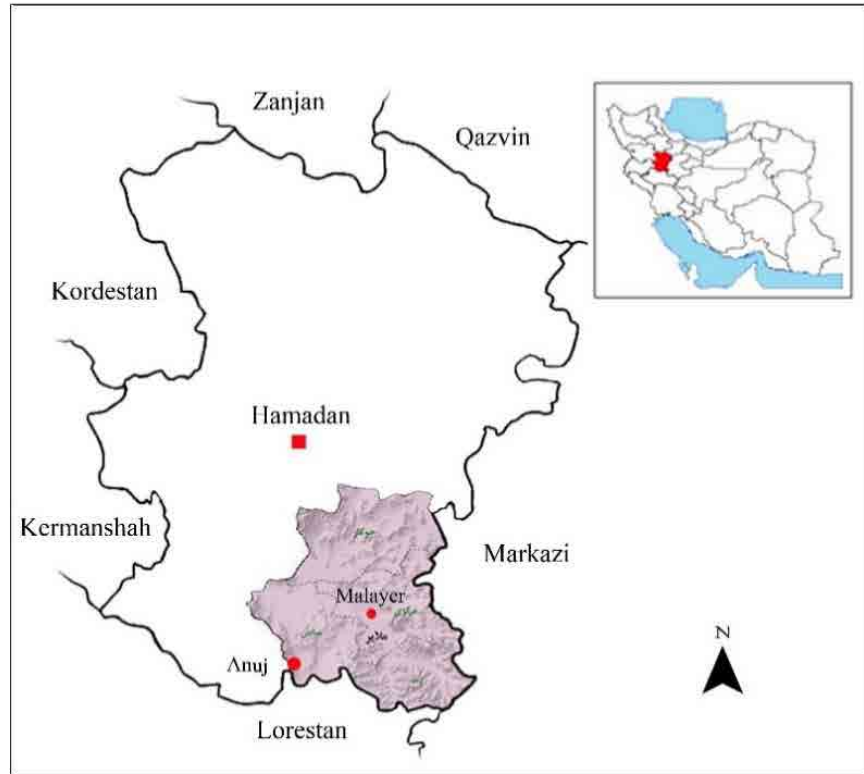


Fig. 1: Location of Tepe Anouj in Malayer, Hamadan Province (Authors, 2025). ▶



Fig. 2: Location of the rock-cut structure of Anuj near the ancient mound of Qaleh Bolandeh, Anuj (Google Earth, 2018). ▶



◀ Fig. 3: General view of Tepe Anouj (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 21).



◀ Fig. 4: The main core zone of Tepe Anouj (Authors, 2024).

Archaeological Findings

At Tepe Anouj, salvage excavation was conducted to mitigate the potential hazard posed by detached deposits on the northern side of the mound. For this reason, and in order to obtain maximum information from the detached part of the mound, stratigraphic excavation was carried out through section drawing and systematic data recording. The excavation was undertaken in two parts: Trenches A and B. Their stratigraphy revealed the Middle and Late Chalcolithic, the Early Bronze Age (Yanik tradition), and the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Godin III tradition). Since the total height of the

mound is 21 m and the excavated part reached a lesser depth, encompassing only the prehistoric layers of the site, the research continued with a surface survey of the mound, through which layers from the historical periods—including Median (Iron Age III), Parthian, and the Middle and Late Islamic centuries—were identified (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018).

Tepe Anouj was excavated for two main reasons:

- 1) To mitigate the risk of collapse in the detached parts (A and B) from the main core of the mound on its northern and northeastern sides;
- 2) For research purposes, to understand the stratigraphic sequence in this area and to determine the chronological evidence of the mound based on the data obtained, supplemented by existing surface survey data.

Stratigraphic Excavation

On the northern side of Tepe Anouj, to obtain the maximum possible information from the unstable and hazardous portion, scaffolding was erected at the location designated for the stratigraphic section before fieldwork commenced. In the two detached areas on the northeastern side of the main mound, two stratigraphic sections were established: Trench A in the detached northern part and Trench B in the detached northeastern part. Part A is situated in the northern area of the site at a height of 1050 cm above the surrounding ground level. There, with the aim of establishing a section and investigating the stratigraphic sequence, 17 loci of various kinds were identified. Part B is located on the western side of the mound. This part stood at a height of 750 cm above the surrounding ground level, and based on the condition of the layers, a total of 13 loci were identified. Furthermore, due to the difference in height between the overall mound (21 m) and the detached areas (Part A: 10.5 m; Part B: 7.5 m), a surface survey of the site was also conducted. Cultural data and evidence belonging to periods including the Median (Iron Age III), the Parthian, and the Islamic periods were identified on the surface of the site (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 28, 68). Although such surface evidence alone cannot indicate the thickness, continuity, or quality of occupation in any given period, it certainly attests to the presence of human activity within the site during these eras. This finding further underscores the significance of the site and the necessity of systematic stratigraphic excavation in the elevated, undisturbed core of the mound to clarify the complete occupational sequence and to assess the quality of occupation in each period.

Stratigraphic section of Part A (Trench A)

Trench A was excavated in a detached portion of Tepe Anouj, situated on its northern and northeastern sides. A section measuring 1 m in width and 10–15 cm in depth was established in this part (the section was limited to a width of 1 m because the maximum width of the remaining deposits at the highest point was 1 m; moreover, a large rounded boulder with a diameter of 70 cm and weighing over 200 kg posed a safety risk to the excavation team, as further impact and disturbance during section cutting could have dislodged it). This part, rising to a height of 10.5 m above the surrounding ground level, presents a vertical stratigraphic sequence to a comparable depth. The recording of 17 loci in this section reveals a continuous, multi-phase picture of occupation and transformation at the site (Figs. 5, 6). The upper layers, consisting of thick mudbrick collapse and cultural deposits containing brick fragments and coarse pottery sherds, likely reflect phases of rapid destruction and accumulation during later occupational phases. In the middle of the section, architectural evidence, including stone-lined structures and compact clay floors, indicates periods of stable and organized occupation. Furthermore, repeated layers of ash and burnt soil throughout the sequence attest to continuous fire-related activities. Toward the lower layers, the density and richness of cultural finds, such as pottery and bone, increase, indicating more intensive human activity in the earlier periods (Table 1). The chronological sequence identified in this section, from top to bottom, includes the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the Early Bronze Age, and the Late and Middle Chalcolithic periods (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 28–50).



◀ Fig. 5: Trench A: Stratigraphy in the part detached from the northern part of Tepe Anouj (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 51).

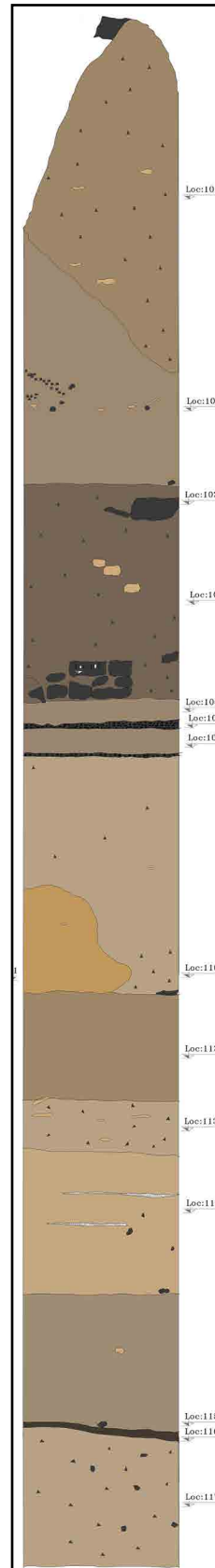
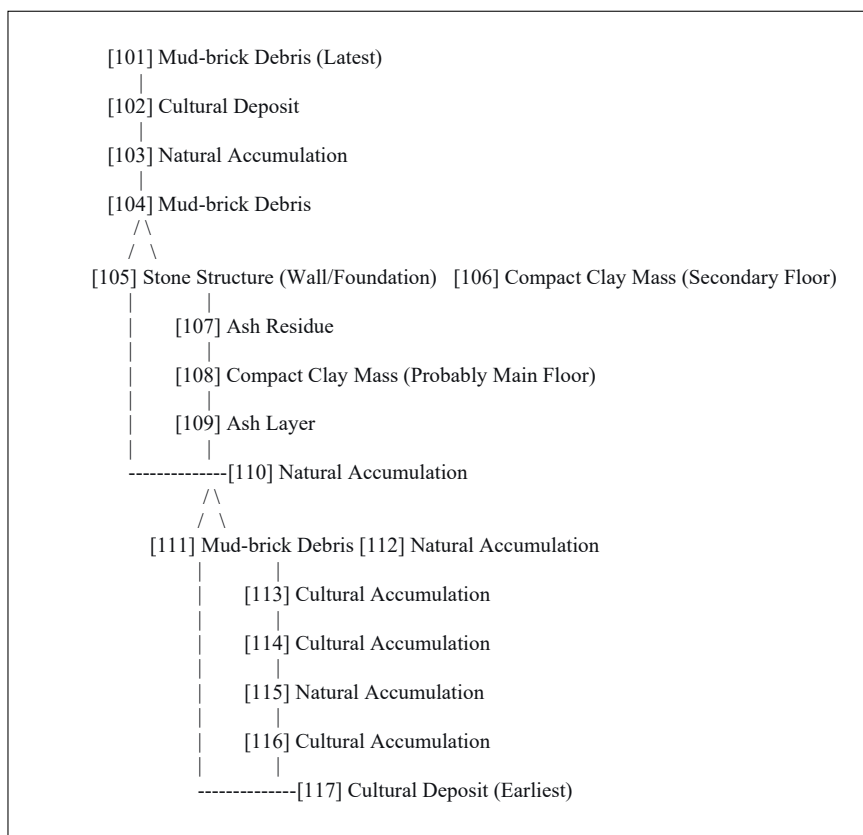


Fig. 6: Stratigraphic section wall of the detached Part A (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 54). ►



◀ Table 1: Stratigraphic matrix of the detached Part A (Authors, 2025).

Stratigraphic section of Part B (Trench B)

This part is located on the western side of Tepe Anouj, adjacent to the road leading to the qanat. The section established in this part, like Trench A, was cut to a width of 1 m and a depth of 10–15 cm owing to potential safety hazards, the risk of collapse, and the loose consistency of the layers in this area. This part stood at a height of 750 cm above the surrounding ground level, and a total of 13 loci were identified (Figs. 7, 8). The loci in this section consisted primarily of sediment, small stone fragments, pottery sherds, particles of ash and lime, as well as debris from mudbrick collapse. Few pottery finds were recovered from this section, and most of the sherds belong to the Middle and Late Bronze Age. These pottery finds have been typed and analyzed.

Surface Survey of the Site

Following the stratigraphic work in the detached parts A and B, a surface survey of Tepe Anouj was also conducted to study the chronology of the site. This survey was carried out across the site with the aim of supplementing stratigraphic data and identifying the occupational periods. Based on the pottery evidence collected from the surface, the presence



Fig. 7: Ternch B: Stratigraphy in the part detached from the main mound (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 88). ▶

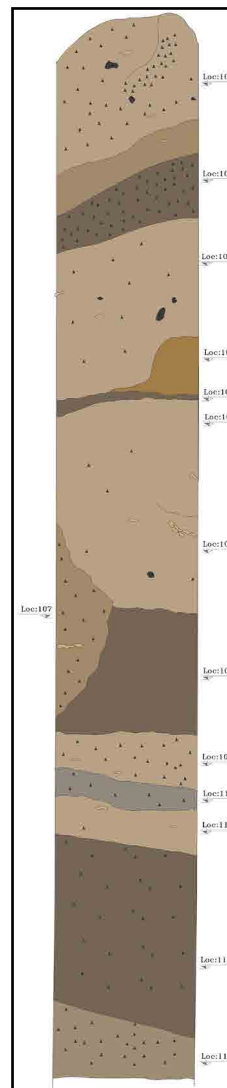
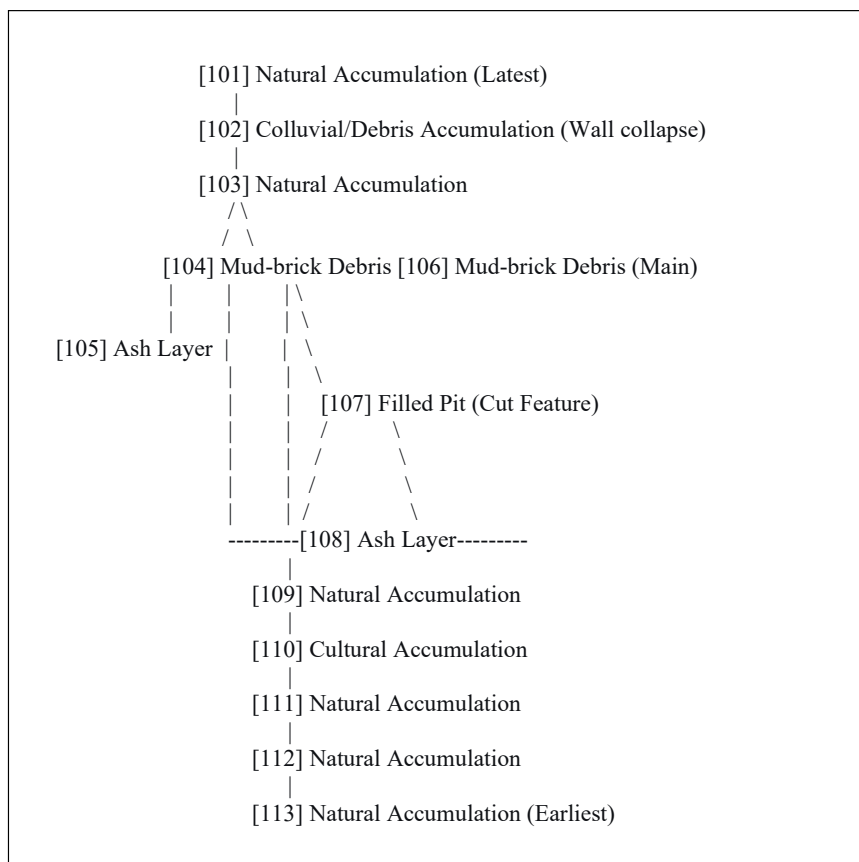


Fig. 8: Stratigraphic section wall of the detached Part B (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018: 90). ▶



◀ Table 2: Stratigraphic matrix of the detached Part B (Authors, 2025).

of communities from the Middle Chalcolithic to the Late Islamic period (Safavid and Qajar) was revealed. The surface pottery evidence indicates the presence of cultural materials dating to the first millennium BC (Median/Iron Age III), the Parthian period, as well as the Late Islamic periods (Safavid and Qajar). Although these finds alone are not sufficient to demonstrate continuous occupation throughout all these periods, the scattered yet diverse presence of pottery from each period across the site raises the possibility of continued human activity—whether in the form of settlement, environmental exploitation, or even ritual use—during the aforementioned timeframes. Determining the precise nature of these activities (residential, funerary, industrial, etc.) will require systematic excavations and stratigraphic investigations in the future.

Pottery Evidence from the in-situ and Surface Context Stratigraphic Pottery Finds

Among the most significant archaeological data obtained from the stratigraphic context at Tepe Anouj are the various pottery finds from different cultural periods. In the following sections, these pottery finds

from each excavation trench will be analyzed and categorized separately (It should be noted that the salvage excavation and hazard mitigation at Tepe Anouj were very different from a conventional stratigraphic excavation. There was a constant risk of collapse from the very loose layers and of resulting debris from the upper part. Consequently, it was not possible for the excavation team to record non-diagnostic pottery data, given the constant danger of debris collapse and the opening of joints without locking mechanisms on the scaffolding at a height of 12 meters. The information presented here is therefore based on diagnostic pottery sherds.

Trench A (The detached northern part) Middle Bronze Age (Godin III)

The Middle Bronze Age pottery at Tepe Anouj (predominantly from Locus 107 and 108) is characterized by a buff-colored paste with mineral temper. The surface bear a thin buff slip. The pottery of this period was wheel-made and well-fired. Most sherds feature geometric decorations in dark brown, including horizontal, diagonal, and wavy lines, as well as shark-tooth (flame) motifs. A point of interest regarding Tepe Anouj is its location adjacent to the Silakhor Plain of Borujerd, near the Garin Mountains of Nahavand—an important center for the production of Godin III painted pottery, attributed to the Middle and Late Bronze age. This pottery type can be identified as a continuous cultural phenomenon throughout this region. The most common vessel forms of this period include angle-necked pots and jars with rounded profiles, as well as hemispherical bowls. The pottery recovered from this period is comparable to Levels III:6 and III:5 at Godin Tepe (Henrickson, 1984: 385; 1987) (Fig. 9).

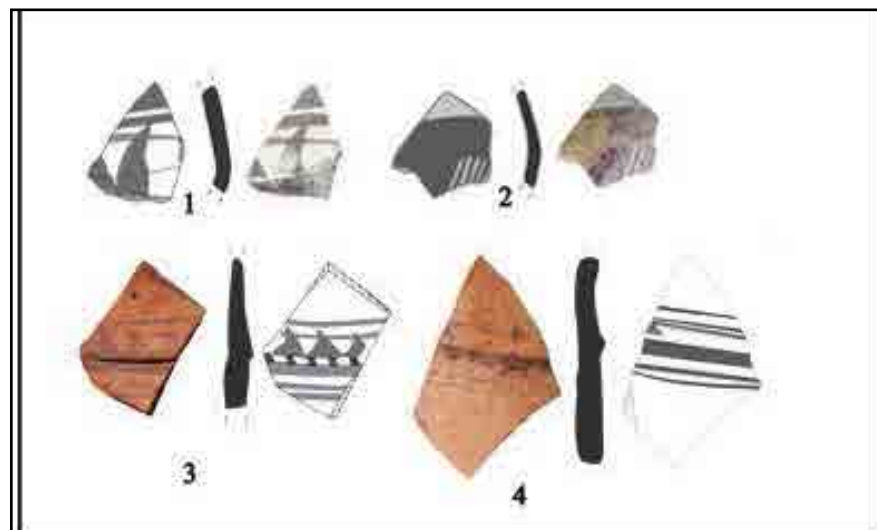
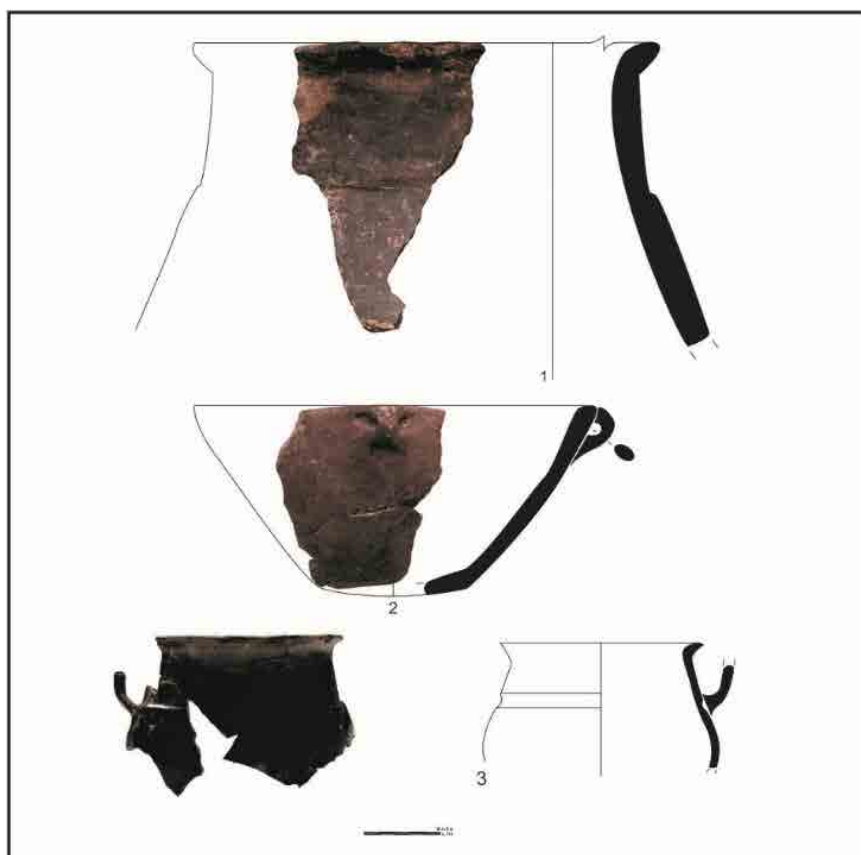


Fig. 9: Middle and Late Bronze age (Godin III) potsherds recovered from Trench A and comparative samples (Authors, 2025). ►

Early Bronze Age (Yanik/Godin IV tradition)

The pottery sherds from this period consist predominantly of grey-black wares. Three diagnostic sherds of this type (Locus 111) were recovered during the excavation, all of which are plain and lack incised decoration. One example takes the form of a diagnostic Early Bronze Age (Yanik cultural tradition) sherd bearing a Nakhchivan handle. Comparable examples of these sherds have been reported from Level IV at Godin Tepe (Young, 1969: 75; Young & Levine, 1974: 85), Gourab Tepe in Malayer (Khaksar, 2006: 125, 202; Khaksar et al., 2014: 57), and Baba Kamal Tepe in Tuyserkhan (Mohamadifar & Hemati Azandaryani, 2021). The forms of this pottery type include:

- 1) Jars with a cylindrical and relatively elongated neck, with a convex shoulder profile;
- 2) Bowls with an open mouth and a vertical loop handle (known as a Nakhchivan handle);
- 3) Carinated goblets with a loop handle at the junction of the body and rim (Fig. 10).



◀ Fig. 10: Early Bronze Age (Yanik/Godin IV) potsherds recovered from Trench A and comparative samples (Authors, 2025).

Late Chalcolithic Period

Ceramic finds from the Late Chalcolithic period (corresponding to Godin

VII and VI) were recovered in limited quantities from the excavation at Tepe Anouj (mostly from Locus 114). All potteries from this period are handmade. Typologically, diagnostic forms of Godin VII include hemispherical bowls with vertical walls and inverted rims, while Godin VI types appear mainly as open-mouthed bowls and spherical jugs with sloping shoulders, comparable to known examples from Godin Tepe and Tepe A, E, and F at Seh Gabi (Young, 1969: 65, 67; Young & Levine, 1974: 12). The pottery of this period at Tepe Anouj can be classified into two main groups according to slip type (it should be noted that these sherds are plain and handmade, lacking the refinement of wheel-made pottery and polychrome geometric designs. This pottery type bears the closest resemblance to Godin VI and VII ceramics):

- 1- Pottery with a thick red slip (diagnostic of Godin VII);
- 2- Pottery with buff-painted paste (diagnostic of Godin VI) (Fig. 11).

Several potsherds (coarse ware with plant temper) with curved rims were recovered from the site. These resemble primitive and proto-types of bevelled-rim bowls and are typologically comparable to early examples of bevelled-rim bowls from Godin Tepe (Young, 1969: 71; Gopnik & Rothman, 2011: 107) (Fig. 12).

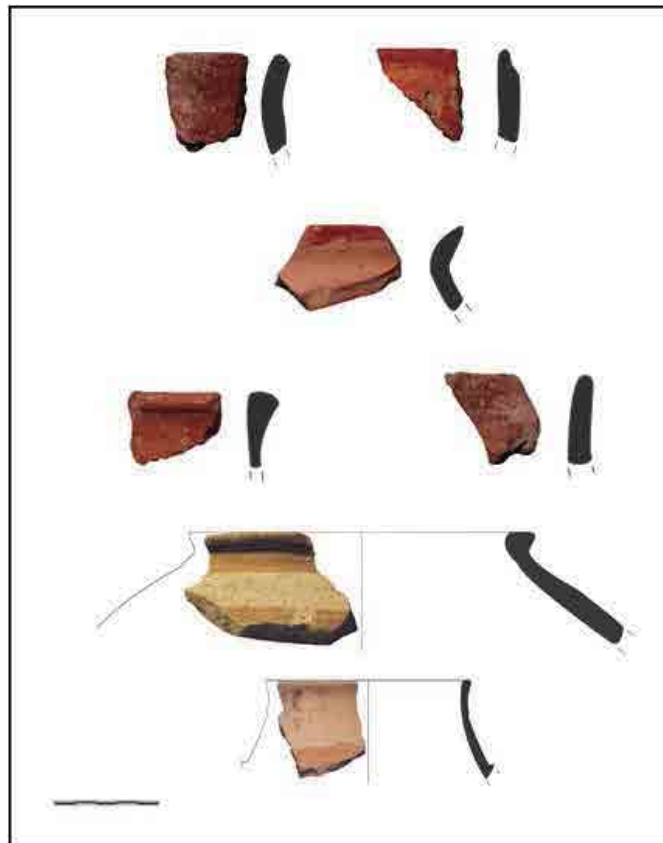
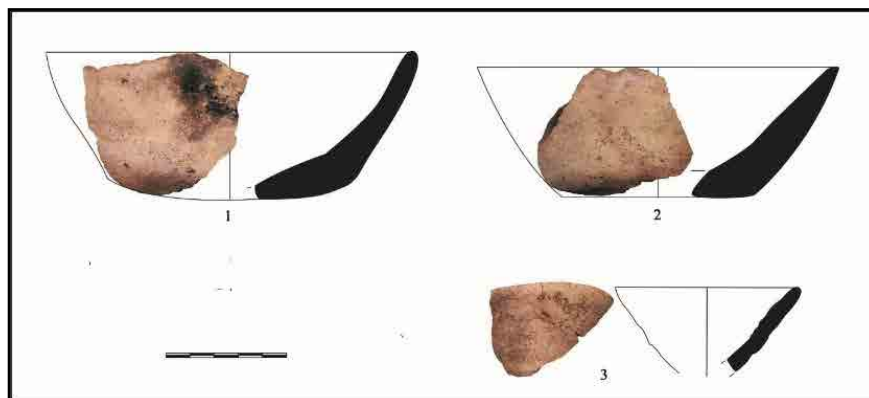


Fig. 11: Late Chalcolithic potsherds recovered from Tepe Anouj, Trench A, and comparative examples (Authors, 2025). ▶

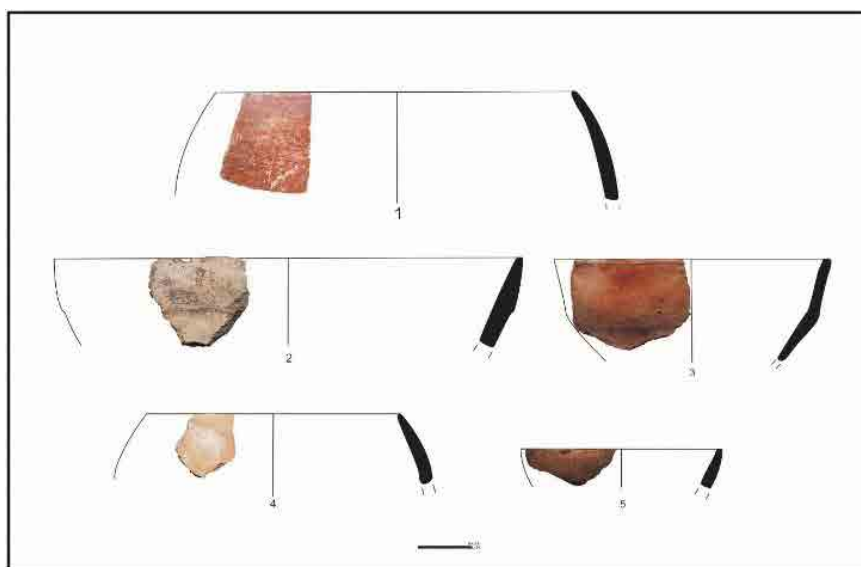


◀ Fig. 12: Pottery types (similar to bevelled-rim bowls?) recovered from Tepe Anouj, Trench A, and comparative examples (Authors, 2025).

Middle Chalcolithic Period

Pottery from the Middle Chalcolithic period at Tepe Anouj was recovered from the lower layers of Trench A (particularly Locus 116). This pottery is characterized by handmade manufacture, organic temper (straw), medium to coarse texture, and medium wall thickness. The paste color ranges predominantly from reddish-buff to red-brown. The surfaces are generally devoid of painted or incised decoration and are finished with a thick slip and burnished surface. This pottery bears the closest resemblance to plain Dalma ceramics from various sites in the eastern Central Zagros, and no examples of impressed or painted Dalma pottery were found in this excavated area.

Typologically, diagnostic forms of this period include open-mouthed pots and hemispherical bowls, which are comparable to examples reported from Period B sites at Tepe Seh Gabi and Siahbid (Henrickson, 1983: 240, 371, 375) (Fig. 13).



◀ Fig. 13: Middle Chalcolithic (Dalma) pottery recovered from Trench A at Tepe Anouj and comparative samples (Authors, 2025).

Trench B (The detached northeast part) Middle Bronze Age (Godin III)

Pottery from this period was recovered from the stratigraphic context of Trench B (Locus 105). It has a buff-colored paste with mineral temper. The pottery was wheel-made and well-fired. The sherds of this type recovered from Trench B are predominantly plain and devoid of decoration. However, examples of geometric designs in brown have also been observed among them. Typologically, this pottery is comparable to materials from Phase 6 of Godin Tepe Period III (Henrickson, 1984: 448; Young & Levine, 1974: 99) (Fig. 14).

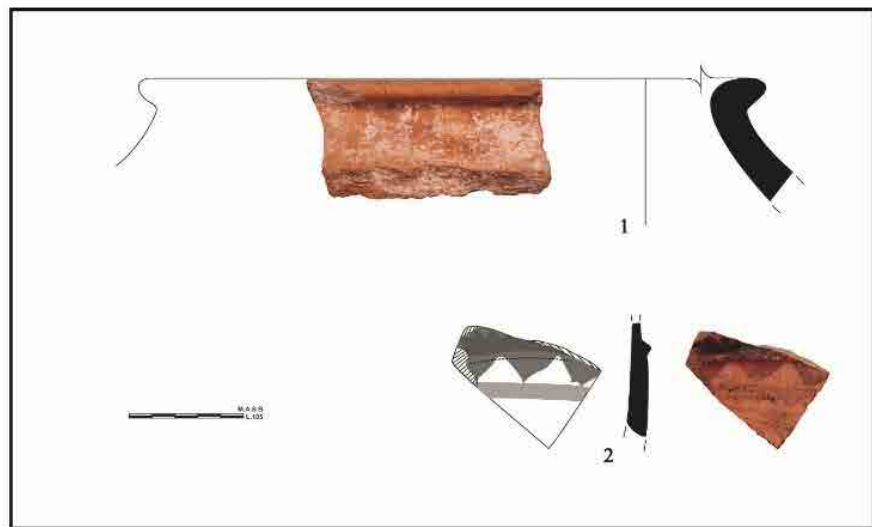


Fig. 14: Middle Bronze period pottery sherds recovered from Tepe Anouj, Trench B, and comparative samples (Authors, 2025). ▶

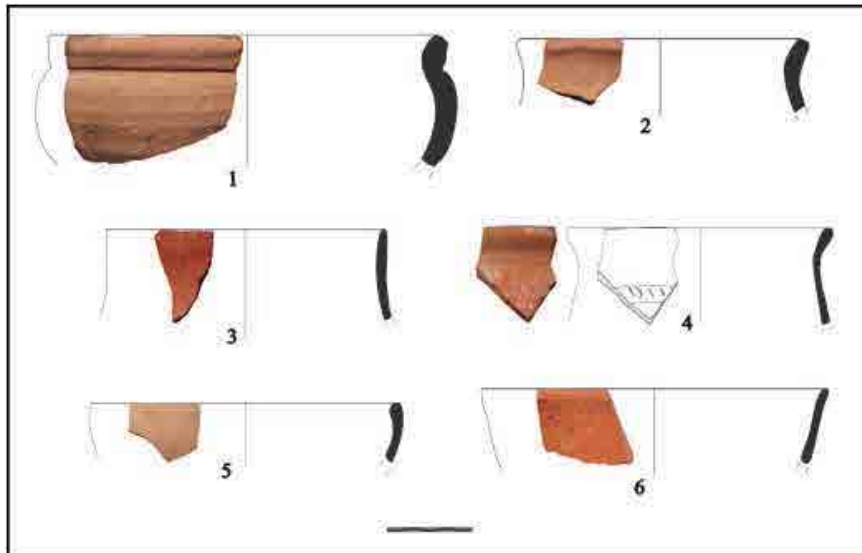
Pottery Finds from the Surface Survey

Subsequently, a systematic surface survey of the site and selective sampling of features and pottery scatters yielded evidence from historical periods, including Iron Age III (probably Median), the Parthian period, and the Late Islamic period. In the following sections, the pottery recovered from these periods is examined, categorized, and compared.

Median period (Iron Age III)

Broadly speaking, the Iron Age can be examined as a period in which a ceramic uniformity exists across the western regions of Iran. Based on archaeological surveys, the number of ancient sites dating to Iron Age III in western Iran shows a relative increase compared to earlier periods (Faraji Cheshmeh Zangi, 2013: 57). Iron Age pottery at Tepe Anouj was identified during the surface survey in the southern part of the mound, adjacent to the area of illegal excavation (at the entrance to this area, mudbricks comparable in dimensions to those of the Median period were observed,

leading to underground spaces located beneath the surface of the mound. These spaces appear to have been created in the late Islamic period, possibly the Qajar period, and, through 3D laser scanning, it was determined that they were connected to a watchtower located on the southwestern surface of the mound; these spaces are completely separated from the rock-cut architectural complex of Anouj). The Median or Iron Age III finds consist of plain buff pottery. The paste of these sherds ranges from buff to orange to brick-red with sand and grit temper. The sherds are well-fired and are wheel-made. In terms of texture, they fall into the category of coarse wares. The general forms include simple bowls with slightly everted (S-shaped) rims, small cups with a convex inward mouth and convex body lacking handles (Nagshineh, 2012: 106), as well as carinated vessels with simple rims (Vahid Dashtjerdi, 2015: 114). The pottery samples recovered from this period at Tepe Anouj are comparable to the examples from Godin II (Gopnik, 2011: 360, 358, 318; Young, 1969: 121, 42), Baba Jan I (Goff, 1985: 19, 15), Baba Kamal (Mohamadifar & Hemati Azandaryani, 2021: 65), Haji Khan Temple (Hemati Azandaryani et al., 2022) and the Iron Age III sites of Jakhroman and Qaleh Kohneh Khaneqah in Sonqor county (Heydarian, 2008: 1144, 1194) (Fig. 15).



◀ Fig. 15: The Median (Iron Age III) potsherds recovered from Tepe Anouj and comparative samples (Authors, 2025).

Parthian Period

The sherds of this period at Tepe Anouj can be classified in two groups: simple and painted pottery.

Plain Pottery

The plain wares range predominantly in color from buff to light brown to light red. Most of these sherds have clay paste and slip with mineral

temper ranging from fine- to coarse-grained particles. The majority of the sherds are wheel-made and exhibit regular, uniform shapes. In general, most vessels were intended for everyday use. The plain wares of the site can be classified into two classes based on decoration:

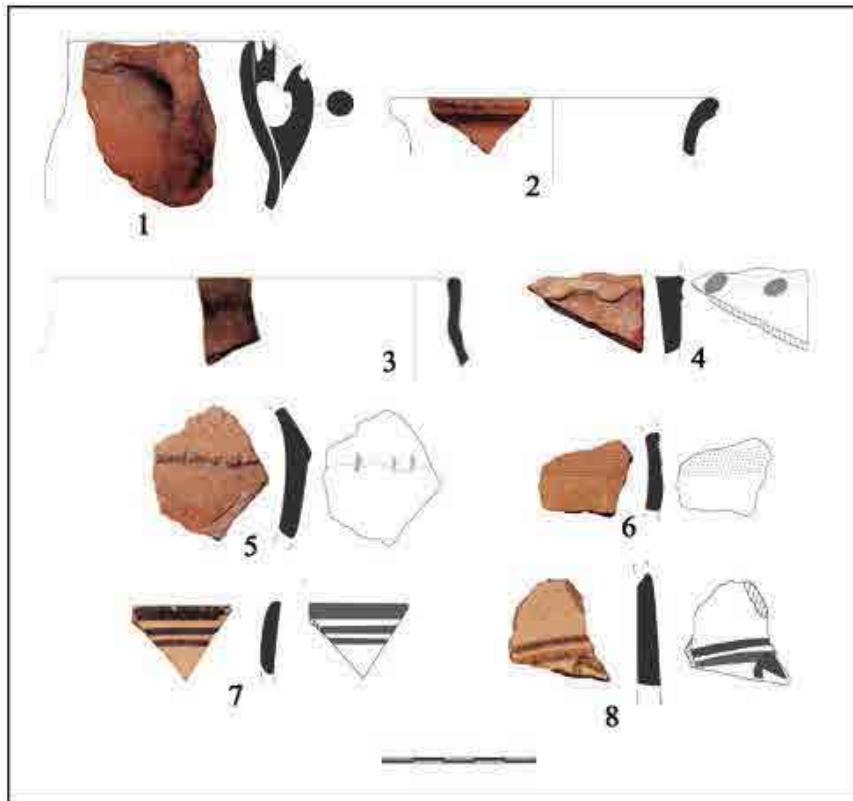
a. This class consists mainly of storage jars. On these sherds, decoration in the form of applied clay coils was added to the vessel body after forming. These bands form interconnected chains, also known as “rope” decoration, which are wrapped horizontally around the vessels. On these bands, additional decorations such as finger-impressed marks and incised vertical and diagonal lines have been executed. Similar pottery has been reported from Qaleh Yazdigird (Keall, 1981: Fig. 25: 14), the Laodicea Temple in Nahavand (Rahbar et al., 2014: 319), the Sang-e Shir site in Hamadan (Afshari & Nagshineh, 2014: 118), and Hegmataneh (Azarnoush et al., 2016: 127). Storage jars and pottery bearing such decoration fall into the category of medium to coarse wares. Other forms of plain ware include jars that typically have a single handle attached at one side to the neck or rim and at the other side to the body. Comparable examples of this pottery type have been recovered from excavations at Qaleh Yazdigird (Khosrowzadeh et al., 2020: 136) (Fig. 16: 1–4).

b. The pottery of this group features incised decoration and applied geometric motifs. The incised decoration consists of straight and parallel lines, or wavy and diagonal lines, executed in one or multiple lines on the pottery. All incised motifs and lines are located on the shoulder or neck of the vessels. These sherds are wheel-made and adequately fired. The predominant colors are buff and brown. Comparable examples of this type have been observed at Qaleh Yazdigird (Khosrowzadeh et al., 2020: 136), the Sang-e Shir site in Hamadan (Afshari & Nagshineh, 2014: 120, 124), and Hegmataneh (Azarnoush et al., 2013: 182) (Fig. 16: 5, 6).

Painted Ware

The production of painted pottery in western Iran first appeared in the Early Parthian period and continued into the Middle Parthian period (Haerinck, 1997: 115). This pottery type was wheel-made and well-fired. Its paste is fine and mineral-tempered, with colors ranging from buff to pinkish-buff to orange and brown. The painted decoration on this pottery type was executed on the exterior surface of narrow-mouthed vessels and on the interior surface of open-mouthed vessels. The color of the motifs ranges from red to brown to orange. The shapes and forms of the vessels mainly include small cups, bowls, and plates. The most important decorations on

the painted pottery of Tepe Anouj are geometric motifs, executed as single or multiple horizontal parallel lines, as well as wavy and diagonal lines. The Parthian painted pottery samples from Tepe Anouj are comparable to samples recovered from the Laodicea Temple in Nahavand (Rahbar et al., 2014: 317) and Hegmataneh (Azarnoush et al., 2016: 127, Fig. 2) (Fig. 16: 7, 8).



◀ Fig. 16: Typical Parthian pottery sherds and comparative examples (Authors, 2025).

Islamic Period

The Islamic period pottery of Tepe Anouj, recovered from the surface survey of the site, is divided into two groups: unglazed and glazed, each of which is described below. The pottery recovered from the Ilkhanid period at the site consists of simple monochrome glazed wares and underglaze painted wares. These ceramic types are examined in the following sections.

Plain Monochrome, Turquoise-Glazed Ware

This pottery type takes the form of bowls with angular bodies, tall circular concave bases, and flat T-shaped rims. It is comparable to the bowl examples widely produced in Sultanabad during the 13–14th centuries CE (Karimi & Kiani, 1985: 42), and similar to examples recovered from the rock-cut structures of Samen, Arzanfoud, and Tepe Hegmataneh (Hemati

[Azandaryani et al., 2017: 195](#); [Hemati Azandaryani & Khaksar, 2022: 178](#); [Ranjbaran, 2012: 475, 493](#)) (Fig. 17: 4, 5).

Monochrome Ultramarine-Blue Glazed Ware

This group of pottery has been recovered from most Islamic sites in various Islamic periods, especially the Middle and Late Islamic centuries. These sherds, in shades of ultramarine blue, have been found at Tepe Anouj. In terms of form, they resemble bowls and small cooking pots. Comparable examples of this pottery type include wares from Samen ([Hemati Azandaryani et al., 2017: 195](#)), Takht-e Soleyman ([Haddon, 2011: 98](#)), Zino-Abad in Bahar city ([Mohammadi & Shabani, 2016: 144](#)), and Arzanfoud ([Hemati Azandaryani & Khaksar, 2022: 177](#)) (Fig. 17: 2, 3).

Under painted Glazed Ware

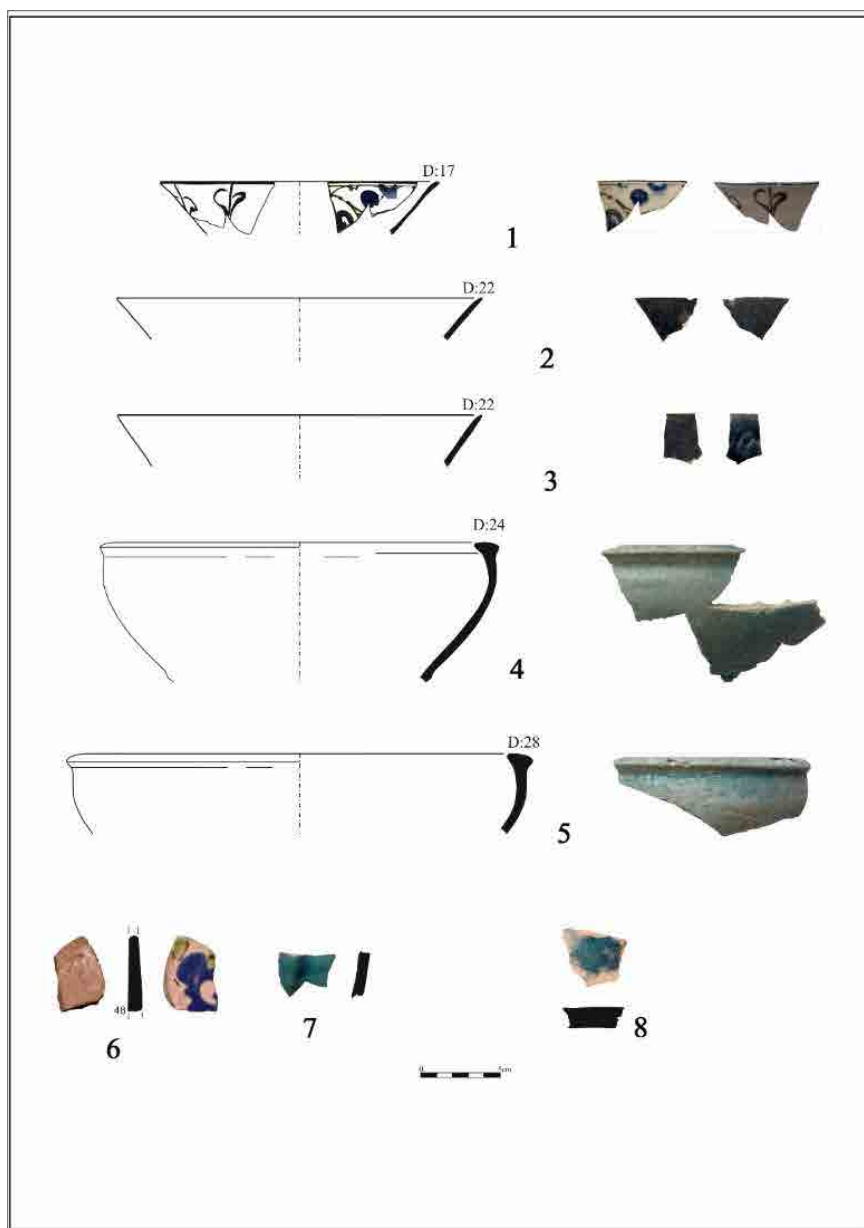
This group of pottery features black designs on a turquoise background. In this type, the vessel body is made of a stone-paste (fritware) with a semi-coarse and porous texture. The black motifs are painted directly onto the vessel body. The pottery is then covered with a transparent turquoise glaze ([Zarei et al., 2014: 87](#)). The vessel forms recovered from the surveys at Tepe Anouj are bowls with geometric designs, which are comparable to examples from Sultanabad ([Karimi & Kiani, 1985: 42](#)), the rock-cut structure of Samen ([Hemati Azandaryani et al., 2017: 198](#)), Zino-Abad in Bahar ([Mohammadi & Shabani, 2016: 145](#)), Bisotun Bridge ([Khanmoradi, 2022: 236, Fig. 5: 31–33](#)), and Arzanfoud ([Hemati Azandaryani & Khaksar, 2022: 182](#)) (Fig. 17: 7, 8).

Blue-and-White pottery

Blue-and-white ware began to develop and spread from the 13th–14th centuries CE, coinciding with the Ilkhanid period, and reached its peak of prosperity and distribution during the Safavid period. The forms of this pottery type are diverse, with large plates, storage jars, jars, bottles, ewers, small cups, and large bowls being among the most common forms ([Karimi & Kiani, 1985: 65](#)). Limited examples of this pottery type have been found at Tepe Anouj. The examples have a stone-paste (fritware) body. These sherds feature geometric designs in blue under a transparent glaze, covered with a milky slip on the surface. They are comparable to examples from Samen ([Hemati Azandaryani et al., 2017: 198](#)), Zino-Abad in Bahar ([Mohammadi & Shabani, 2016: 145](#)), and Arzanfoud ([Hemati Azandaryani & Khaksar, 2022: 184](#)) (Fig. 17: 7, 8).

Qajar Blue-and-White pottery

Blue-and-white wares continued into the Qajar period, albeit with some fluctuations. Part of the blue-and-white production of this period continues the decorative traditions of the Safavid period. In this period, we see the combination of the blue-and-white technique alongside one or two other colors. Alongside white and blue, colors such as pale brown, green, pink, and pale lemon yellow were used (Khanian, 2017: 34–35). Sherds belonging to this period were recovered during surface surveys at Tepe Anouj (Fig. 17: 6).



◀ Fig. 17: Middle and Late Islamic period pottery sherds recovered from Tepe Anouj and comparative samples (Authors, 2025).

Discussion

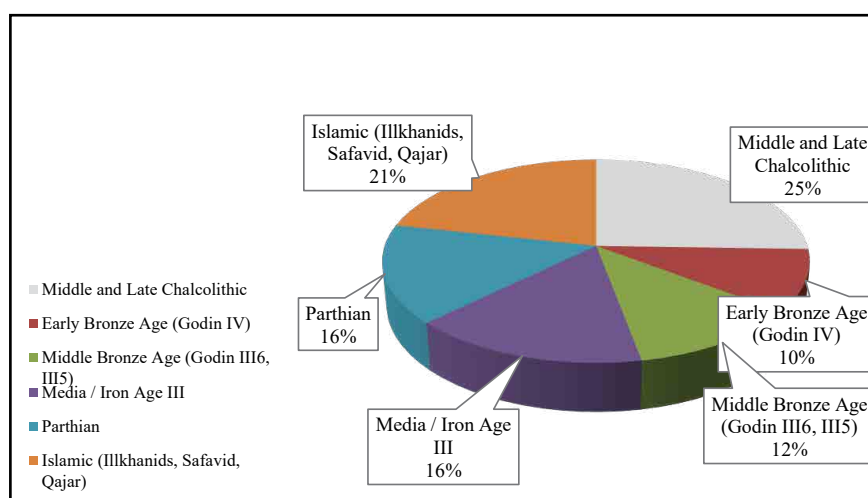
The fieldwork at Tepe Anouj focused on two parts detached from the main core zone of the mound (Parts A and B). The primary objective was to mitigate the risk of collapse, which allowed not only for the resolution of potential hazards caused by falling debris and loose layers detached from the main core of the mound but also for stratigraphic study. As a result of this excavation, cultural remains from three prehistoric periods were identified at the site: the Middle and Late Chalcolithic, the Early Bronze Age, and the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The excavation revealed that the earliest attested occupation in the stratigraphic trenches of Tepe Anouj began in the Middle Chalcolithic period (it should be noted that if future archaeological excavations are conducted at depths below the level of the surrounding ground, earlier layers may also be identified). Given that the height of the main core zone of the mound is 21 m above the surrounding ground level, while the highest excavated part reached only 10.5 m, the Iron Age, historical, and Islamic layers were not recovered through excavation. For this reason, a surface survey of the mound was also conducted to complete the chronology of the site (Hemati Azandaryani, 2018). From the surface survey, evidence of the Median period (Iron Age III), the Parthian period, and the Middle and Late Islamic periods was identified. Accordingly, based on the results of the analysis of the cultural data obtained from both the excavation and the surface survey, the following chronology is proposed for this mound (Table 3).

Table 3: Classification and periodization of the contexts at Tepe Anouj (Authors, 2025). ►

Period	Stratigraphy / Surface Survey
Islamic (Illkhanids, Safavid, Qajar)	Surface survey
Parthian	Surface survey
Median / Iron Age III	Surface survey
Middle Bronze Age (Godin III6, III5)	Stratigraphy
Early Bronze Age (Godin IV)	Stratigraphy
Middle and Late Chalcolithic	Stratigraphy

In the present research, the pottery sherds recovered from the excavation at Tepe Anouj in 2018 and the sherds collected from the surface survey of the site, conducted to complete the chronology, were selected as the statistical population of this study (Chart 1). First, these sherds were grouped based on technical characteristics (paste color, temper type, firing level, and slip type) and form. Subsequently, the results of this typology were compared with evidence from neighboring regions, and the typological relationships of the site's pottery with other areas were assessed. Accordingly, the degree of typological connection and ceramic similarity, as well as the

chronology of Tepe Anouj, were suggested. Initially, the Chalcolithic period and its pottery were analyzed, leading to the identification of both the Middle and Late Chalcolithic periods based on ceramic evidence. The Middle Chalcolithic pottery sherds include Dalma types, while the Late Chalcolithic sherds consist predominantly of pottery with a thick red clay slip. The latter are mostly in the form of hemispherical bowls, open-mouthed bowls, and spherical jugs with everted rims. The pottery finds from this period are comparable to Dalma pottery samples from Tepe B at Seh Gabi, Godin VII and VI, and the pottery from Siahbid and Maran (Henrickson, 1983; Young & Levine, 1974).



◀ Chart 1: Pie chart of the frequency of pottery sherds from the occupational periods of Tepe Anouj (Authors, 2025).

In the subsequent layer of the excavation, pottery sherds from the Early Bronze Age belonging to the Yanik culture (referred to as Godin IV in the Central Zagros) were recovered. The pottery from this layer consists of grey, unburnished sherds that are plain and devoid of decorative motifs. The common vessel forms of this period at the site include jars with cylindrical necks, open-mouthed bowls with Nakhchivan lugs, and carinated goblets with loop handles. The Yanik culture data from the mound are comparable to Level IV at Godin Tepe in the Central Zagros (Levine & Young, 1974), Gourab Tepe on the Malayer Plain (Khaksar, 2006: 60; Khaksar et al., 2014: 57), Tepe Pisa (Mohamadifar & Motarjem, 2008), Qaleh Sarsakhti in Shazand (Shirzadeh, 2021: 54), Baba Kamal Tappeh in Tuyserkan (Mohamadifar & Hemati Azandaryani, 2021), and Yanik Tepe in northwestern Iran (Burney, 1961; 1962). Following this layer, evidence belonging to the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Godin III) was identified. This phase represents the latest layer recovered from the excavation of Parts A and B at Tepe Anouj. The pottery of this period at the site has a buff-colored surface slip. The pottery sherds from this

layer are comparable to those from Godin Tepe, particularly Phases III:6 and III:5 at that site (Henrickson, 1984). In terms of form, the pottery vessels from this layer include angle-necked pots and jars with rounded profiles, as well as hemispherical bowls. Some of the pottery features dark brown motifs, including shark-tooth (flame) patterns, as well as horizontal, diagonal, and wavy lines. During the surface survey conducted following the salvage excavation of the site in 2018, evidence from Iron Age III, the Parthian period, and the Late Islamic period was identified. In this research, the pottery finds obtained from this survey have also been analyzed and studied. First, the pottery types of the Iron Age are discussed. During the surface survey of Tepe Anouj (and not from the stratigraphic excavation), mud-brick fragments measuring 42×24×12 cm were found. These are comparable in size to mud-bricks from the Median period, including those from Nush-i Jan (Stronach, 1978), Moush Tepe (Mohamadifar et al., 2015), Haji Khan Temple (Hemati Azandaryani et al., 2022), Baba Kamal Tappeh (Mohamadifar & Hemati Azandaryani, 2021), and Gunespan Tepe (Young, 1969; Naseri et al., 2016: 108). Furthermore, based on typological and comparative evidence with the Central Zagros region, the Median (Iron III) Period pottery recovered from Tepe Anouj dates to Iron Age III (800–550 BC). The main vessel forms of this period at the site include simple bowls with S-shaped profiles, small cups with convex inward-turning mouths, and carinated vessels. In form, these are comparable to examples from Godin Tepe Level II (Gopnik & Rothman, 2011: 358, 360), Baba Jan Level I (Goff, 1985: 15, 19), as well as surface surveys conducted in western Iran, including those in Sonqor city (Heydarian, 2006).

The next period for which evidence was identified from the surface survey of the site is the Parthian period. The pottery from this period at the site was found in two forms: plain ware and painted ware. The plain wares consist mainly of storage jars and single-handled jars, with decoration in the form of applied rope motifs and incised designs. Examples of this type from Tepe Anouj are comparable to sites such as Qaleh Yazdigird (Keall, 1981: 14, Fig. 25), the Laodicea Temple in Nahavand (Rahbar et al., 2014: 319), the Sang-e Shir site in Hamadan (Afshari & Nagshineh, 2014: 118), and Hegmataneh (Azarnoush et al., 2016: 127). Painted pottery from the Parthian period has also been recovered from Tepe Anouj. The motifs on these sherds are predominantly horizontal lines, which are comparable to examples recovered from surveys in western Iran, such as those from Harsin in Kermanshah (Chehri et al., 2016: 87).

Surface surveys of the site also indicate the presence of cultural materials from the Late Islamic periods (Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar). Diagnostic examples include Ilkhanid glazed wares (with turquoise and ultramarine, blue glazes) as well as Safavid and Qajar blue-and-white wares. Within the framework of this research, these have been compared with diagnostic examples from neighboring sites (such as the rock-cut structures of Samen, Arzanfoud, Zino-Abad, and the Laodicea Temple) and relatively dated. Based on the pottery finds recovered from Tepe Anouj through the excavation of Trenches A and B as well as the surface survey of the site, it has been determined that the site was first occupied by human groups during the Middle Chalcolithic period and continued to be settled through the Middle and Late Islamic periods. According to the surface survey, the site was abandoned for a period following the Middle and Late Bronze Age and was reoccupied during Iron Age III. After this period, evidence from the Parthian, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar periods was found on the surface of the site, in chronological order.

The architectural finds from the site, including mudbricks with standardized dimensions comparable to Median period examples from other sites (Nush-i Jan Tepe, Godin Tepe, and Gunespan Tepe), indicate the observance of common structural patterns of that period and possibly shared architectural traditions in the region. Furthermore, the identification of compacted soil layers (with potential floor features), along with the distribution of charcoal particles and animal bone fragments, provides tangible evidence of settlement and subsistence activities at the site. These finds primarily reflect activities such as cooking, food processing, and domestic waste disposal within the settlement area. Given the evidence for initial occupation at Tepe Anouj from the Middle Chalcolithic period and the cultural similarities with Median period sites, it can be proposed that Tepe Anouj played an important role in the regional interaction network of western Iran. However, to determine the precise chronology and achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the subsistence economy and ancient environment, more extensive stratigraphic excavation in the main core of the mound, together with absolute dating (C14) on charcoal and bone samples, as well as specialized archaeobotanical studies (to reconstruct vegetation and agriculture) and zooarchaeological analyses (to examine patterns of hunting, animal husbandry, and the use of animal resources), appears essential. In summary, with its relatively continuous occupational sequence spanning the transitions from the Chalcolithic to the Median (Iron III Age), this site can be considered a key site for the study of cultural and settlement developments during this specific time frame in the

region. Continued field and laboratory research focusing on these periods can significantly contribute to a better understanding of the position of Tepe Anouj within the archaeological framework of western Iran during the fifth to first millennia BC.

Conclusion

The results of the present research at Tepe Anouj have revealed a relatively extensive chronology of cultural and occupational periods at the site. The cultural sequence begins with the Middle Chalcolithic period (Dalma culture) and continues through the Late Chalcolithic (Godin VII–VI), the Early Bronze Age (Yanik/Godin IV), and the Middle Bronze Age (Godin III). This continuous sequence, obtained from the salvage excavation (hazard mitigation) in the detached portion of the northern and northeastern parts of the mound, demonstrates the pivotal role of this site in the developments of the fifth to second millennia BC in the region. Furthermore, surface surveys confirmed the presence of scattered cultural materials from Iron Age III (Median period), the Parthian period, and the Late Islamic periods (Ilkhanid to Qajar), indicating reoccupation or temporary settlement in the later historical periods following a probable occupational hiatus. Taken together, these findings reflect, on the one hand, the continuity of settlement and subsistence activities during the prehistoric periods and, on the other hand, highlight the strategic communicative position of Tepe Anouj within the cultural corridor of western Iran. However, methodological limitations arising from the nature of the salvage excavation mean that questions concerning absolute chronological precision, the process of internal site development, and the details of the subsistence economy must be addressed through future research. To complete our understanding of the site's significance, extensive stratigraphic excavation in the central core of the mound, absolute dating, and specialized interdisciplinary studies are recommended. In summary, Tepe Anouj, with its valuable sequence of cultural developments from the Chalcolithic to the Bronze Age, represents a key document for the chronology and archaeology of the Malayer region and the Central Zagros.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors, while adhering to publication ethics in citation and referencing, declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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چکیده

تپه انوج (معروف به قلعه بلنده) در روستایی به همین نام از توابع شهرستان ملایر در استان همدان واقع شده است که از محوطه‌های شاخص بخش شرقی زاگرس مرکزی است. پژوهش‌های باستان‌شناختی در این تپه در سال ۱۳۹۷ ه.ش. انجام گرفت و منجر به شناسایی ادوار مختلف فرهنگی از دوران مس‌وسنگ میانی تا دوران میانی و متأخر اسلامی گردید؛ هرچند شواهدی از برخی دوره‌های میانی (مانند: عصر آهن I, II، دوره هخامنشی، سلوکی، ساسانی و صدر اسلام) در این پژوهش به دست نیامد. برای گردآوری داده‌های فرهنگی، از فعالیت‌های میدانی نظیر کاوش و بررسی‌های باستان‌شناختی استفاده شد. هم‌چنین، اطلاعات لازم از طریق منابع کتابخانه‌ای و گزارش‌های موجود تکمیل گردید. درنهایت، فرهنگ‌های دوره‌های مختلف در محوطه مورد مطالعه، بررسی و تحلیل شدند. مهم‌ترین پرسش مطرح‌شده در راستای پژوهش حاضر بدین صورت است که توالی لایه‌های گاهنگاری در تپه انوج چگونه است و چه دوره‌های را دربر می‌گیرد؟ نتایج این پژوهش بیانگر آن است که شواهد استقرار و ادوار مختلف فرهنگی، از جمله: دوره‌های مس‌وسنگ میانی و جدید (گودین IV)، مفرغ میانی و جدید (گودین III)، آهن III، اشکانی، ایلخانی، و قاجاریه در این محوطه شناسایی شده است. نتایج این پژوهش، نه تنها گاهنگاری استقرار در تپه انوج را روشن می‌سازد، بلکه یافته‌های این کاوش نشان می‌دهد که محوطه انوج دارای پتانسیل بالایی برای مشارکت در درک بهتر تحولات فرهنگی منطقه است؛ چراکه شواهد استقرار ناپیوسته، اما طولانی مدتی را از دوره پیش از تاریخ تا دوران اسلامی در خود جای داده است.

کلیدواژگان: ملایر، تپه انوج، کاوش نجات بخشی، لایه نگاری، سفال، گونه شناسی.

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