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Iron Age and Historical Period in Mazandaran: Classification and Typology of the Grave Goods of Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery, Babol

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Abstract

Regarding the Iron Age and historical periods of the Mazandaran district, no comprehensive chronological research based on grave goods has been conducted to date. Most studies have focused on pottery collections and have been based on archaeological surveys rather than excavations; consequently, the description, classification, and chronology of materials have often been influenced by cultural-historical approaches. In this context, two seasons of archaeological excavation and survey at the Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery, Babol, resulted in the discovery of a collection of grave goods, among which pottery vessels are the most prominent. The burial assemblage contains a diverse range of materials, including pottery, metal objects, weapons, ornaments, and bone and stone tools. At Shahneh Poshteh, a group of vessels with diverse forms and colors has been identified, representing a significant factor in establishing the relative chronology and cultural attribution of the cemetery to Iron Age I, II, III and IV (from the Achaemenid to the early Parthian periods), spanning from the late second millennium to the second half of the first millennium BC. Iron objects are rarely found at this cemetery, whereas bronze was extensively used for the production of weapons and ornaments. The present research seeks to address questions concerning the typology and classification of the objects, their historical and chronological relationships, and their stylistic and cultural interactions with sites of the same cultural horizon within Mazandaran and beyond, including the Gorgan Plain, Gilan, the Central Plateau, and western Iran. The site appears to occupy a significant position within the framework of the Mazandaran cultural sequence and shares similarities with several contemporary sites, including Gohar Tepe, Tepe Parija, Hotu, and Lafurak. Although it exhibits stylistic affinities with several prominent Iranian sites, such as Marlik, Ghaleh Kuti, Kaluraz, Qeytariyeh, Khurvin, MersinChal, and Sialk, it also demonstrates distinct cultural developments and locally specific pottery styles.

Keywords: Iron Age, Mazandaran, Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery, Grave Goods, Typology and Classification.

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Introduction

Following the major socio-cultural transformations of the Late Bronze Age across Iran, which resulted from a combination of diverse factors, new phenomena emerged in various regions of Iran, many of which were rooted in the events of the Late Bronze Age and the second millennium BC and ultimately formed the foundations of the Iron Age. The most important of these factors were the emergence of cemeteries, the cultural continuity of the black-gray burnished vessels alongside other pottery styles such as dark and light gray as well as red earthenware of the Iron Age in the northern half of Iran, the wider adoption of iron artifacts together with bronze objects, and the development of large regional polities. Meanwhile, especially in discussions of the relative dating of sites, the existence of cemeteries with no associated settlements and the expansion of gray pottery are closely related to each other and have received more attention due to their high abundance and considerable research potential. In fact, cemeteries have always been an important source for studying the cultural trends and archaeological developments in the Iranian Iron Age, and although fewer settlement sites have been found to date, cemeteries have played a significant role due to the broad set of analytical variables such as grave goods and funerary practices. One of the controversial topics of the Iron Age that has overshadowed studies of the initial processes and development of this period for several decades is the emergence of burnished gray ware, which still remains unresolved. Although other characteristics of the Iron Age pottery include the presence of painted buff and red-orange vessels, gray pottery is of particular importance for dating the beginning of the Iron Age, trans-regional interactions and homogeneity, as well as human migrations. (Hosseinzadeh Sadati *et al.,* 2019; Kambakhsh Fard, 1970; Burney, 1970; Ghirshman, 1939; Young, 1965).

Following extensive studies by archaeologists such as Young (1994), Dyson (1965; Dyson & Muscarella, 1989), Medvedskaya (1982), Muscarella (1974), Haerinck (1988; 1989; Haerinck & Overlaet, 2004b) and Vanden Berghe (1964, 1969), recently, new data have been obtained through the development of archaeological field studies that have shed new light on the study of the Iron Age. Archaeological excavations in the Tehran and Qazvin regions including the sites of Sagzabad (Fazeli Nashli *et al.,* 2011) and Pardis (Fazeli Nashli and Aghalari, 2015), the Kashan region including the Estrak-Joshaqan cemetery (Hosseinzadeh Sadati *et al.*, 2019), and the Qom region with the sites of Qoli Darvish (Sarlak, 2011), Shamshirgah, and Sarm (Fahimi, 2003), have shown that black gray pottery, possibly iron metallurgy (Fazeli Nashli *et al.,* 2022: 155) and even

the phenomenon of cemeteries independent of settlements were present in these regions much earlier than previously thought, and therefore their cultural connection with the Bronze Age gray pottery of northeastern Iran and especially the Iranian-speaking populations was further questioned. Apparently, the formation of the cemeteries of Estrak-Joshaqhan, Pardis, Qeytariyeh, Khurvin, Sarm and Sialk A dates back to ca. the 18th and 17th centuries BC and therefore the phenomenon of the cemetery together with the "Gray Pottery Culture" dates back several centuries earlier than previous dating and predates the Iron Age based on new absolute chronology (Hosseinzadeh Sadati *et al.,* 2019: 434). Meanwhile, Dyson had dated Hasanlu V to around 1500-1250 BC and to the beginning of the Iron Age, after which the Hasanlu IVC layer was placed around 1250 BC as Iron II. For many years, the Hasanlu stratigraphy served as the benchmark for all sites attributed to this period throughout Iran, but the Hasanlu revision project conducted by Michael Danti introduced serious changes to the Hasanlu cultural sequence so that Hasanlu V was placed as a continuation of the Late Bronze Age and Hasanlu IVC as Iron Age I (Danti, 2013a; Danti, 2013b).

There are also a large number of cemeteries and settlements attributed to the Iron Age in the Mazandaran region. According to studies, among the 350 known sites from the Paleolithic to the Iron Age, 15 sites have been dated to the Bronze Age and 252 sites to the Iron Age. Moreover, of the 252 Iron Age sites, information has been obtained from archaeological excavations for only about 20 sites, and the rest have been identified only in archaeological surveys (Heydari, 2016; Heydari *et al.,* 2021). Apparently, many Bronze Age sites in the region have been mistakenly identified as Iron Age sites due to the traditional archaeological approach (Safari, 2020). Finally, it can be said that the results of new excavations in Iranian Iron Age sites, especially the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, can lead to a revision of views on the cultural trends of the Iron Age in Mazandaran and Iran. In the present study, an attempt is made to classify and group the collection of grave goods from 39 burials in this site to explain the position of Shahneh Poshteh within the framework of the Iron Age of Mazandaran and Iran and to examine the quantity and quality of the material remains of its burials.

Research Questions and Hypotheses: Based on the archaeological data obtained from two seasons of excavations and survey at the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, including burial assemblages recovered from graves as well as other funerary characteristics, this study seeks to address several research questions concerning the classification and typology of grave goods, their chronological and morphological relationships and

the cultural interactions of the cemetery with contemporaneous sites at both regional and interregional scales. These comparisons encompass the sites within Mazandaran as well as neighboring regions, including the Gilan, the Gorgan Plain, Iranian Central Plateau and western Iran. It is hypothesized that while Shahneh Poshteh exhibits distinctive local cultural traditions and ceramic styles, its material culture conforms to the broader regional cultural sequence of Mazandaran. In particular, it demonstrates morphological affinities with sites such as Lafurak, Hotu Cave, Gohar Tappeh, and Pari Ja Tappeh. Furthermore, stylistic similarities can be observed between Shahneh Poshteh and several prominent Iron Age sites across Iran, including Marlik, Qaleh Kuti, Kaluraz, Qeytariyeh, Khurvin, Mersin Chal and Sialk cemeteries suggesting patterns of cultural interaction and shared material traditions.

Research Method: This study employs a descriptive-comparative approach based on the field data. Data concerning the funerary assemblages from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery were compiled primarily from the preliminary excavation reports documenting the contents and characteristics of individual graves. Subsequently, the archaeological data were analyzed, classified and then interpreted through an extensive review of published literature, including archaeological reports and scholarly articles relating to contemporaneous sites across different regions of Iran. This comparative approach has provided a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural developments represented at Shahneh Poshteh, as well as the quantity, composition and qualitative characteristics of the grave goods associated with its human burials.

Theoretical Framework

One of the most significant variables in the study of the material cultures of past societies, particularly through the investigation of ancient human burials, is the analysis of the quantity and quality of grave goods associated with individual inhumations. Such funerary assemblages provide valuable information not only about the material culture deposited alongside the deceased but also about the ideological beliefs, ritual practices and mortuary traditions of the communities responsible for the burials. Among some scholars, grave goods have occasionally been regarded as possessing greater interpretive value than other burial variables, such as grave architecture, body position or burial orientation. This perspective stems from the fact that funerary assemblages constitute a unique source of archaeological and sociological information including the abundance and quality of associated artifacts, their relationship to the social status and rank of the deceased, the

existence of specific mortuary rituals and their comparison with the material culture of associated settlement sites, where such evidence is available. Despite the fundamental importance of grave goods in the history of archaeological thought, providing a satisfactory definition and interpretation of funerary assemblages has long remained a challenging issue. During the formative stages of archaeological research, although various assumptions were proposed regarding the reasons why objects were placed in graves, scholarly discussions focused primarily on identifying the types of artifacts recovered from burials. In recent decades, however, burial studies have increasingly shifted away from a purely object-centered approach, drawing instead upon theoretical perspectives derived from anthropology and related disciplines. Today, researchers examining the multiple possible functions and meanings of grave goods have frequently concluded that the archaeological record alone rarely provides sufficient evidence to determine which of the various motivations for including objects in burials is the most plausible (Table 1). As Fredrik Ekengren succinctly observes "How can we determine whether the objects deposited with the deceased constituted personal possessions, gifts, ritual equipment, or ceremonial objects?". While it is essential to consider the wide range of possible reasons and symbolic meanings underlying the deposition of artifacts in graves, reaching definitive conclusions on the basis of archaeological evidence alone is generally impossible (Cooper *et al.*, 2020: 136).

Table 1: Collection of comments and definitions about grave goods in graves (after: Cooper *et al.*, 2020: 137, Tab. 1). ▼

Grajetzki 2014	Härke 2014	Harding 2016
Containers for the dead	Equipment for the hereafter	Grave furnishings
Equipment for the journey to the afterlife	Inalienable property	Personal ornaments and dress fittings
Furnishings for houses in the afterlife	Potlatch	Indications of rank or status in society
'Helping hands' for the afterlife (e.g. servants)	Indicators of rank, status and identity	Funerary accessories
Funerary ritual leftovers	Metaphor	Residues from the funerary process
Guardians (for protection against the living)	Remains of the funeral feast	Tokens of esteem from kin, clients, etc.
Protective objects (used in life/for the afterlife)	Gifts to the deceased	Offerings to supernatural
Personal objects	Gifts to a deity	–
Objects preserving the dead's social identity	Disposal of polluted items	–
Messages (to the dead)	Protection of the living (and the dead?)	–
Models/miniaturized objects	Forgetting	–

The Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery

The site of Shahneh Poshteh, that covers an area of approximately 11 ha, is situated southwest of the town of Khoshrudpey in the Bandpey-e Gharbi District, approximately 21 km south of the city of Babol, Mazandaran Province (Fig. 1). This site, which comprises both cemetery and settlement components, is located on the northern foothills of the Central Alborz Mountains. Its geographical situation is indicative of the lifeways of the mobile pastoral communities that occupied the highlands of Mazandaran during the Iron Age. So far, Shahneh Poshteh has been investigated through two seasons of archaeological excavations and surveys. These field investigations resulted in the discovery and documentation of 39 well-preserved and archaeologically analyzable human skeletons, together with the detection of a small habitation area containing domestic architectural remains and a hearth. The cemetery was first subjected to limited archaeological excavation in 2018, concurrently with the nearby Tepe Qaleh Ben approximately 500 m to the north, leading to the identification of 11 human burials (Fazeli Nashli, 2018). A second excavation season conducted in 2020 which uncovered 28 additional human burials, as well as the later settlement area (Fig. 2), (Fazeli Nashli, 2019).

It should also be noted that excavations revealed evidence for 32 additional burials that had been completely destroyed, rendering them unsuitable for archaeological analysis. Consequently, detailed archaeological investigations were carried out on 39 excavated burials that distributed among 28 graves with diverse groups of funerary and ritual practices such as grave goods, grave structures and inhumation methods. These excavations yielded an important body of archaeological evidence that has significantly enhanced our understanding of the Iron Age cultural traditions of Mazandaran and more broadly the Iranian Plateau (Tahmasebifar *et al.,* 2026). With regard to the chronology of the site, comparative analyses of the funerary assemblages together with five radiocarbon (14C) dates obtained from human skeletal remains, demonstrate that the excavated burials share chronological and cultural affinities with Iron Age sites both within Mazandaran and across other regions of the Iranian Plateau. The chronological evidence indicates that 29 burials date back to the late second millennium BCE to the middle of the first millennium BCE, corresponding to Iron Age I–III, whereas the remaining 10 burials (all of them excavated from Trench 6 in close spatial association) belong to the Late Achaemenid–Early Parthian period (Iron Age IV). This chronological sequence suggests a degree of cultural continuity among the communities that occupied and utilized the Shahneh

Poshteh cemetery from the Iron Age into the subsequent historical period (Fazeli Nashli *et al.,* 2026).

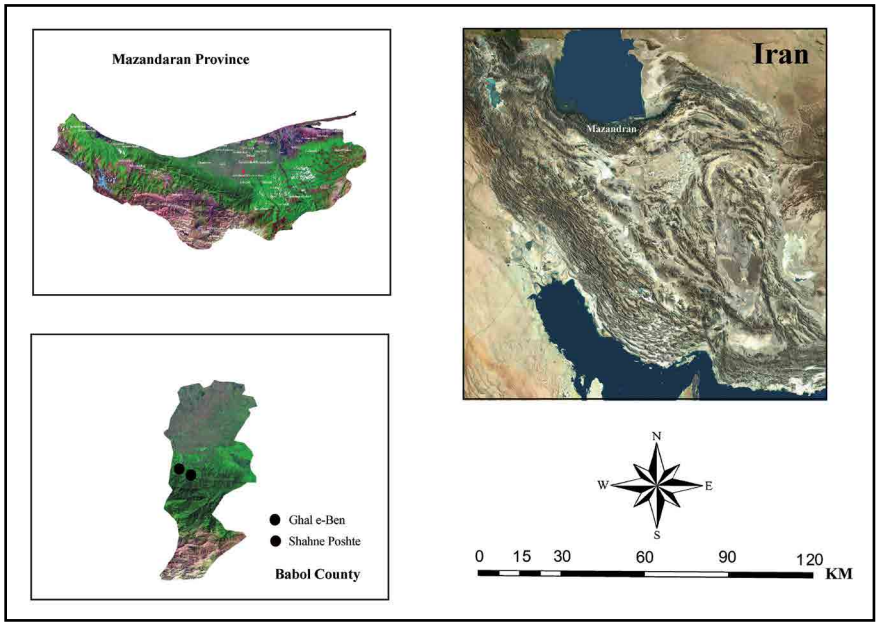


Fig. 1: Geographical location of Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery in Mazandaran Province (Authors, 2025). ▶

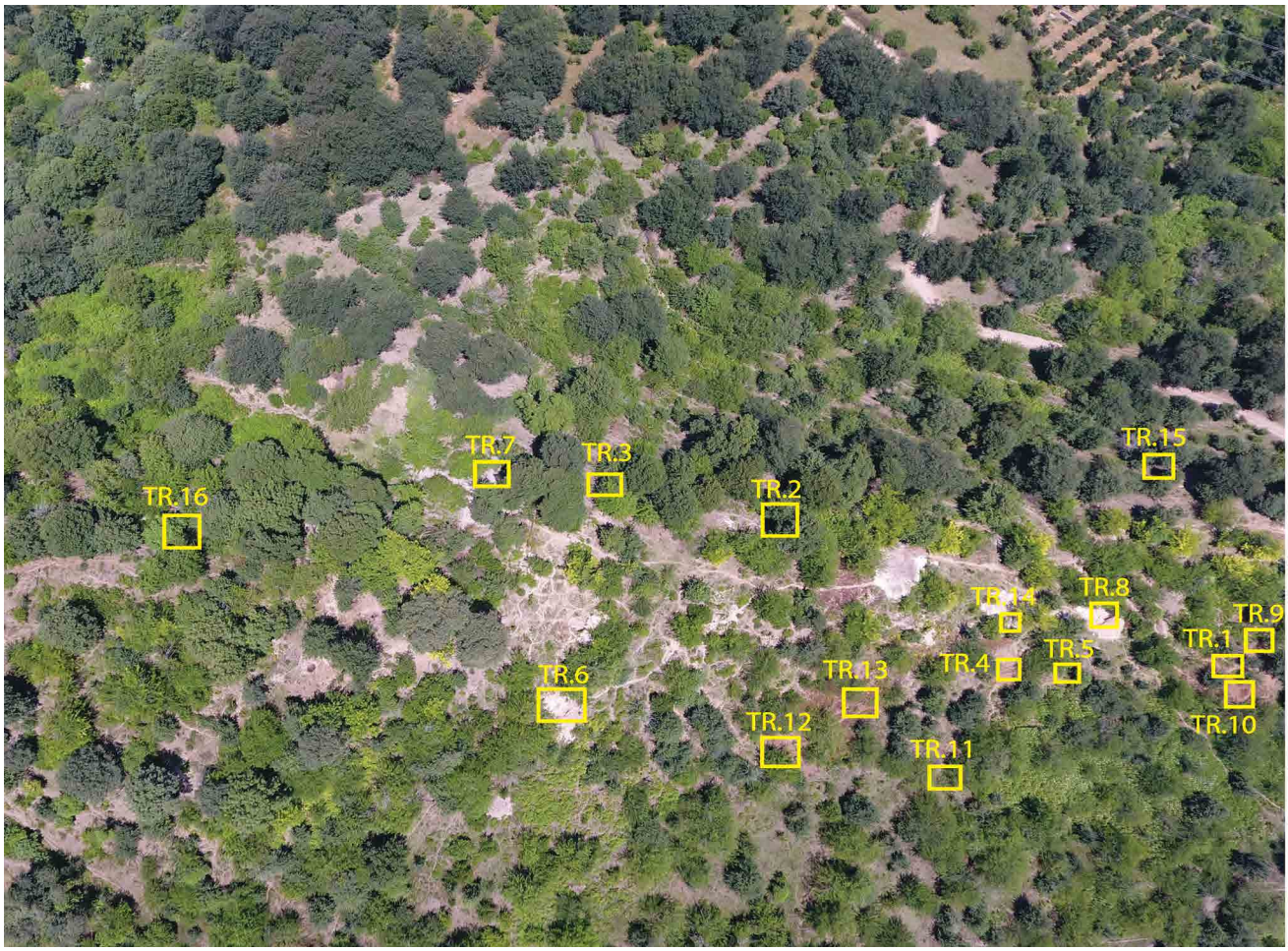


Fig. 2: Aerial view of the Shahneh Poshteh Cemetery (Authors, 2025). ▼

Grave Goods and Funerary Assemblages

The Iron Age cemetery of Shahneh Poshteh has yielded a remarkably rich and diverse assemblage of grave goods; of the 39 excavated burials, 27 inhumations (approximately 70%) contained funerary offerings. Based on sex estimations, these burials include males, females, and individuals of indeterminate sex, representing a broad range of age categories including infants, juveniles, adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults. The quantity and composition of grave goods associated with each burial appear to vary according to the social and individual status of the deceased. The funerary assemblages comprise a diverse array of pottery and metal vessels, personal ornaments and jewelry, weapons and utilitarian implements. Each artifact category exhibits distinctive morphological and decorative characteristics that allow further typological subdivision.

1. Pottery Vessels

Earthenware vessels constitute the most abundant category of grave goods recovered from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery. A total of 41 vessels were recorded and then classified into eight principal morphological types, including jugs, jars, bowls (spouted and pedestal bowls), tripod vessels, cups, milk-vase (shirmak), censers/strainers and cooking vessels. These earthenware vessels occur in a variety of surface colors such as gray, red, brown and orange.

1.1. Jugs

A total of 16 jugs were recovered from the funerary assemblages and based on surface color and morphological characteristics, can be divided into several groups. In terms of surface treatment, the assemblage includes five gray examples, two red examples, six orange red (brick-red) examples, one light gray example, one orange example, one brown example, and one grayish-brown specimen. Morphologically, the jugs can be classified into two principal groups, the first of which comprises three subtypes:

1- Globular or ovoid jugs with a tall concave neck, including: (a) examples with a vertical handle in gray, orange-red, orange, and brown (Fig. 3: 1–8); (b) examples with a curved (humped or nose-shaped) handle in red and orange-red (Fig. 3: 9–11); (c) a miniature gray jug lacking a handle, in gray (Fig. 3: 12).

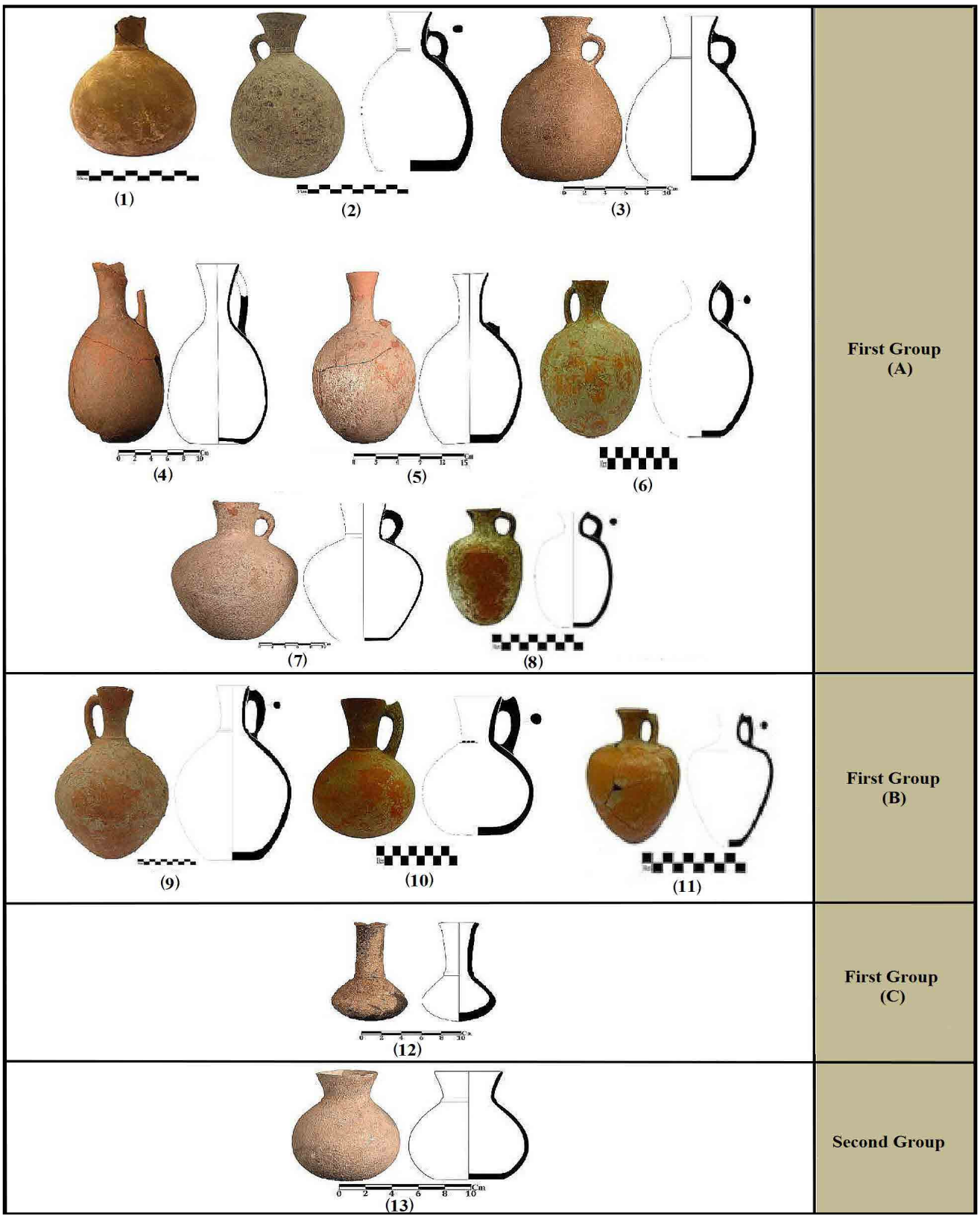
2- The second group comprises ovoid or egg-shaped vessels with a comparatively wide mouth (Fig. 3: 13).

Furthermore, the handles themselves may be divided into two principal forms: simple vertical oval handles and curved oval vertical (humped

or nose-shaped) handles. The former occurs on Jugs nos. 1–8, whereas the latter characterize Jugs nos. 9–11 (Fig. 3). It is noteworthy that this distinctive curved handle type featuring a raised projection attached near the rim is otherwise represented only on a small cup recovered from Burial no. 20 (Fig. 6). This observation suggests that the handle form remained in use over an extended chronological span, continuing into the Achaemenid–Parthian period. The curved handles are typically characterized by a pronounced hump-like projection positioned either at the midpoint of the handle or at its junction with the rim. Two principal decorative techniques occur on these jugs: the first consists of a raised horizontal band encircling the neck, while the second comprises an incised horizontal band. The raised bands are present on Jugs nos. 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 13, whereas incised decoration occurs only on Jug 3 (Fig. 3). The raised bands are most frequently observed on gray wares, followed by orange-red vessels. In terms of dimensions, rim diameters range from 5 to 17 cm, while bottom diameters vary between 9 and 14 cm. Comparable jug forms have been reported from numerous Iron Age sites throughout Mazandaran and the Iranian Plateau, including Qaleh Kuti I (Fukai & Ikeda, 1971: Pl. XXXI: 7), Rudbar (Hakemi, 2017: 253, Pl. 370), Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 101: 505), Bouyeh (Jahani, 2011: 43, Fig. 21: 26), Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 126, Pl. 175), Amlash (Azizi Kharanaghi & Mojezati, 2021: 119), Mersin Chal (Nemati, 2022: 127, Pl. 5), Lafurak (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 241, Fig. 6–4), Gandab (Sharifi-Hevelaei, 2007: 242, Fig. 2), Qeshlaq Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 101: 503), Toul-e Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004a: 67, Pl. 19; 68, Pl. 24), Khurvin Cemetery (Kiani, 1979: 16), Tepe Kaboud'val (Aliabad-e Katoul), (Mir Mousavi & Nokandeh, 2017: 41, Pl. 4: 2–15), Posht-i Lam of Ziarat in Gorgan (Alaeddin, 2015: 161, Vol. 8–1), and Tepe Pardis (Fazeli Nashli & Aghalari, 2015: 168, Pl. 19: 2).

1.2. Jars

Jars constitute another major category of pottery vessels recovered from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery. A total of 12 examples were identified among the funerary assemblages which, based on surface color and morphological characteristics, can be divided into several groups. In terms of surface treatment, the assemblage comprises three gray vessels (one of which is morphologically comparable to the cooking ware), five orange-red (brick-red) examples, one reddish-brown vessel and also three brown examples. Morphologically, the jars may be classified into three principal types, although several highly fragmented specimens could not be assigned to any specific category:



▲ Fig. 3: Typology of burial jugs in Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Authors, 2025).

1- Globular to ovoid vessels with sharply defined shoulders, a tall cylindrical neck and a wide mouth, generally featuring a plain rim, although one example exhibits an everted rim and one vessel is pedestal-based, whereas the remaining examples lack a foot. This group occurs in gray, orange-red, and brown colors (Fig. 4: 1–4).

2- Globular jars with a very wide mouth and a markedly everted oblique rim (Fig. 4: 5).

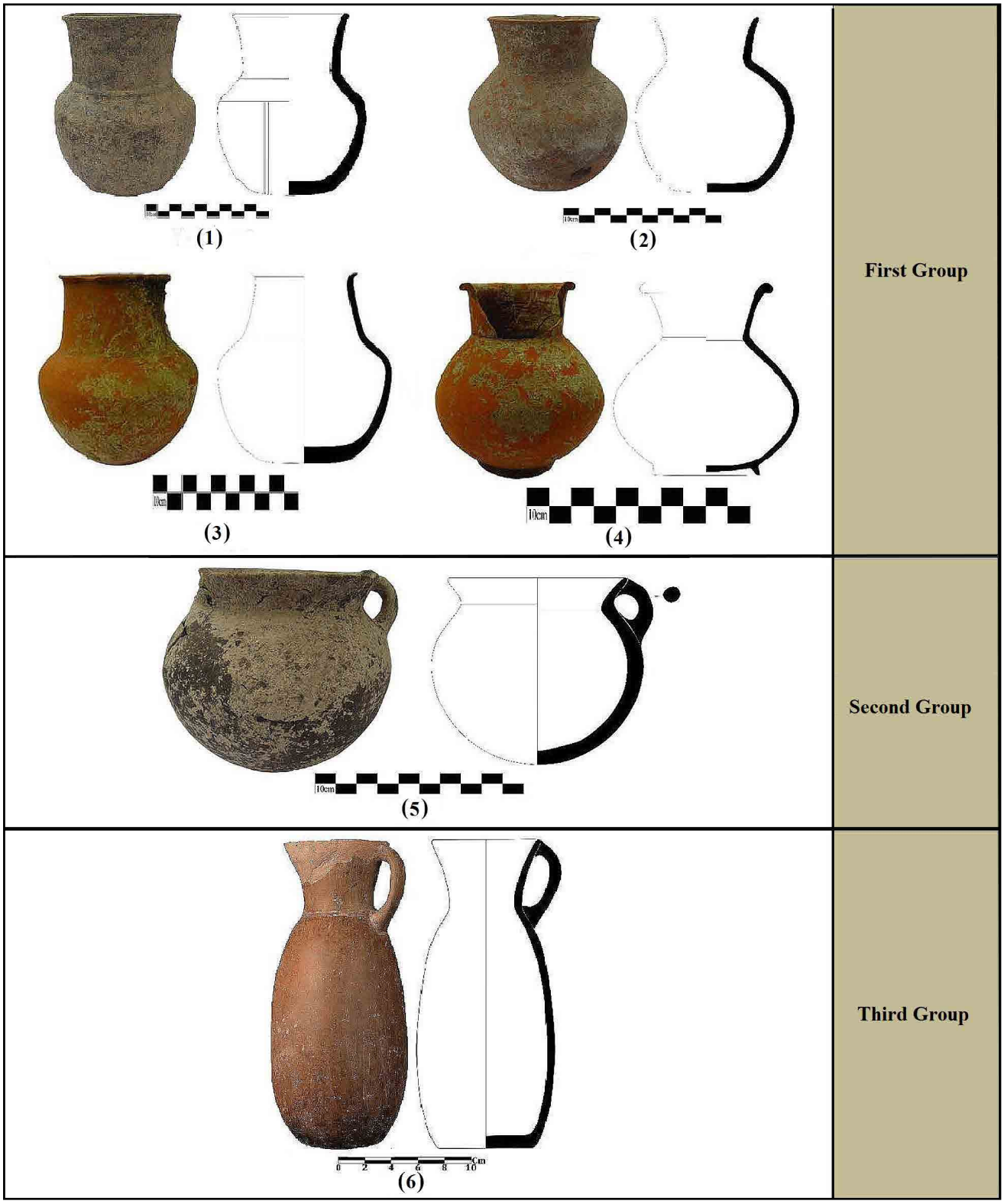
3- A tall cylindrical vessel with a single vertical handle, represented by a unique brown example (Fig. 4: 6).

Furthermore, two principal decorative techniques were identified on the jars. The first consists of raised bands, including a horizontal band encircling the neck and a vertical band extending down the vessel body. This decorative scheme is represented by only one gray vessel (Fig. 7: 1). The presence of the horizontal strip on the neck suggests that this decorative element was a common stylistic feature shared by both the jugs and jars of Shahneh Poshteh. The second decorative technique is burnished decoration that is represented by hatching motifs impressed onto the exterior surface of a fragmented jar. The occurrence of this decorative style indicates the continued use of burnished motifs into the late first millennium BCE (Iron Age IV, corresponding to the Late Achaemenid–Early Parthian period). Comparable jar forms from Shahneh Poshteh have been identified at numerous Iron Age sites in Mazandaran and across the Iranian Plateau. In particular, the vessels illustrated in Fig. 4: 1–4 exhibit close typological parallels with examples from the Rudbar region (Jahani, 2011: 43, Fig. 21: 17), Zarchal in Amlash (Azizi Kharanaghi & Mojezati, 2021: 105), Toul-e Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004a: 67, Fig. 20; 69, Fig. 27), Veskeh (Khalatbari, 2004b: 229, Fig. 24), Mian'rud (Ibid: 236, Fig. 51), Kaluraz (Tadahiko & Takuro, 2006: 11, Fig. 3: 35–36; 19, Fig. 11), and Hassani Mahale (Nishiaki *et al.*, 2006: 153, Pl. 74, Fig. 2).

1.3. Bowls

A total of five bowls were recovered from the burials; these vessels may be classified into two principal morphological types, while their surface treatment can be divided into five color groups: gray (one example), orange-red (brick-red; one example), brown (one example), brownish-orange (one example), and orange (one example). From a typological perspective, the bowls fall into two main categories: pedestal bowls (button-footed bowls) and spouted bowls (gutter-shaped bowls).

1- The first group (Fig. 5: 1–3) comprises footed/pedestal bowls with either globular or angular bodies supported on a short circular pedestal.



▲ Fig. 4: Typology of burial jars in Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Authors, 2025).

These short pedestal bases correspond to what is commonly termed "button-footed" bases in the literature on the Iranian Iron Age. Comparable examples have been reported from several Iron Age sites, including Lafurak Cemetery (Abedini Araghi, 2017: Figs. 4–6, 4–7), Kaluraz (Tadahiko & Takuro, 2006: 21, Fig. 13), Mian'rud (Khalatbari, 2004b: 202, Pl. 15: 15), and Qaleh Kuti I (Nishiaki *et al.*, 2006: 25, Pl. 10: 1).

2- The second group consists of gray and orange spouted bowls (Fig. 5: 4), characterized by globular bodies fitted with a short gutter-shaped spout. These vessels occur in two variants: handleless vessels and others with a single vertical handle. Close parallels have been identified at Gohar Tepe (Piller & Mahfroozi, 2009: 10, Fig. 12), Parija (Rezaei-Nia *et al.*, 2021: 59, Pl. 3), Qaleh Kuti II (Fukai & Ikeda, 1971: Pl. XXVI: 7), Tandavin (Khalatbari, 2004c: 228, Pl. 8: 1, 3), Maryan (Ibid: 228, Pl. 8: 7, 10), and Qaleh Kuti I (Nishiaki *et al.*, 2006: 81, Pl. 38: 1–2). Among the entire bowl assemblage, only one footed bowl (Fig. 5: 2) bears decoration. The vessel is ornamented with a burnished lozenge motif arranged in a continuous and regular pattern around the shoulder. Similar burnished decorative motifs have been documented on bowls from Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996:

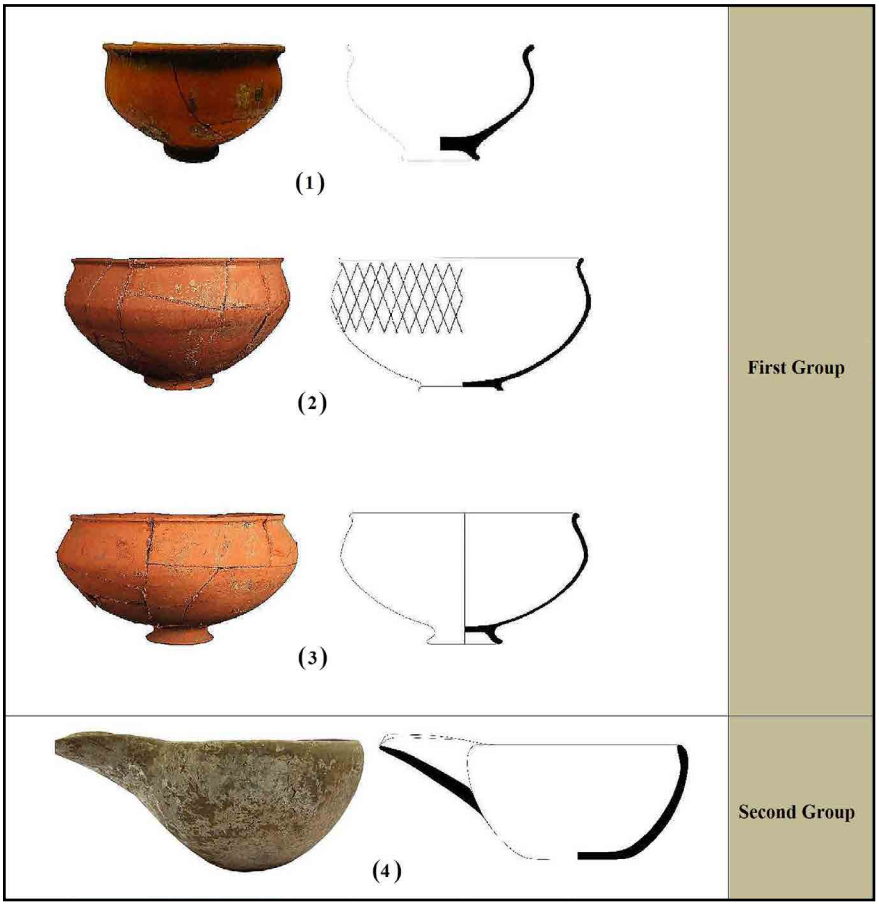


Fig. 5: Typology of burial bowls (Authors, 2025). ▶

Fig. 26: 585–856), Jeyran Tepe of Ozbaki (Majidzadeh, 2010a: 510, Pl. 272; 525, Pl. 303; Majidzadeh, 2010b: 139, Pl. 32: 2, 5, 7), and Sialk A Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pls. XXXIX: S453b; XLII: S503a). In terms of dimensions, the bowls exhibit a maximum rim diameter of 34 cm and a maximum base diameter of 13 cm.

1.4. Tripod Vessel

The tripod vessel represents one of the distinctive ceramic forms obtained from the Shahneh Poshteh. In previous studies, this type of vessel has occasionally been described as a pedestal bowl or even a fruit stand (Kambakhsh Fard, 2000: 226). Morphologically, it consists of a wide-mouthed bowl supported by three elongated legs which converge at their lower ends into a central stemmed base. Only one complete example of this vessel type was recovered during the excavations at Shahneh Poshteh. An additional fragmented specimen was identified during the surface survey of the cemetery, suggesting that this vessel form was relatively common at the site. The complete brown tripod vessel (Fig. 6) is distinguished by its elaborate burnished decoration: the interior and exterior of the bowl are ornamented with slightly curvilinear horizontal lines, while the stemmed pedestal is decorated with oblique hatched lines covering its entire surface. The vessel measures 23 cm in rim diameter, 13 cm in base diameter, 31 cm in total height and 11 cm in bowl depth. Comparable examples have been reported from several Iron Age sites, including Gandab Cemetery (Sharifi-Hevelaei, 2017: 57), Hotu Cave (Naqshineh, 2005: 77, Fig. 5: 11), Gohar Tepe (AG2IV-7), (Piller & Mahfroozi, 2009: 11, Fig. 14: 5a–c) and Lafurak (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 189, Fig. 4-3: 42), which are generally attributed to Iron Age II–III. Earlier parallels have also been identified at Qeytariyeh Cemetery (Kambakhsh Fard, 2000: 150, 227, Fig. A–C; Farokhnia, 2020: 123, Table 2) and Qareh Tepe of Sagzabad (Deh Pahlavan *et al.*, 2019: 385, Fig. 15). Collectively, these examples illustrate the long-term stylistic development of tripod vessels up to the Achaemenid–Parthian period, to which the Shahneh Poshteh specimen also belongs.

1.5. Cups

Two small cups were recovered from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery assemblage. The cup no. 1 is a small brown vessel with a wide mouth and two vertical hump-backed (curved) handles attached near the rim. The vessel surface is heavily exfoliated, giving it a coarse appearance reminiscent of cooking ware. Nevertheless, owing to its distinctive

morphology and small dimensions (rim diameter: 6.5 cm; base diameter: 7 cm), it is more appropriately classified as a cup. Close parallels have been identified in Burial no. 31 of Sialk B Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. LXIII, S. 849) and Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 106, Pl. 124). Moreover, the cup no. 2 is coated with a thick brown slip and is characterized by a single vertical handle and a comparatively closed narrow mouth, giving it a distinctive morphological appearance (Fig. 6: Nos. 1–2).

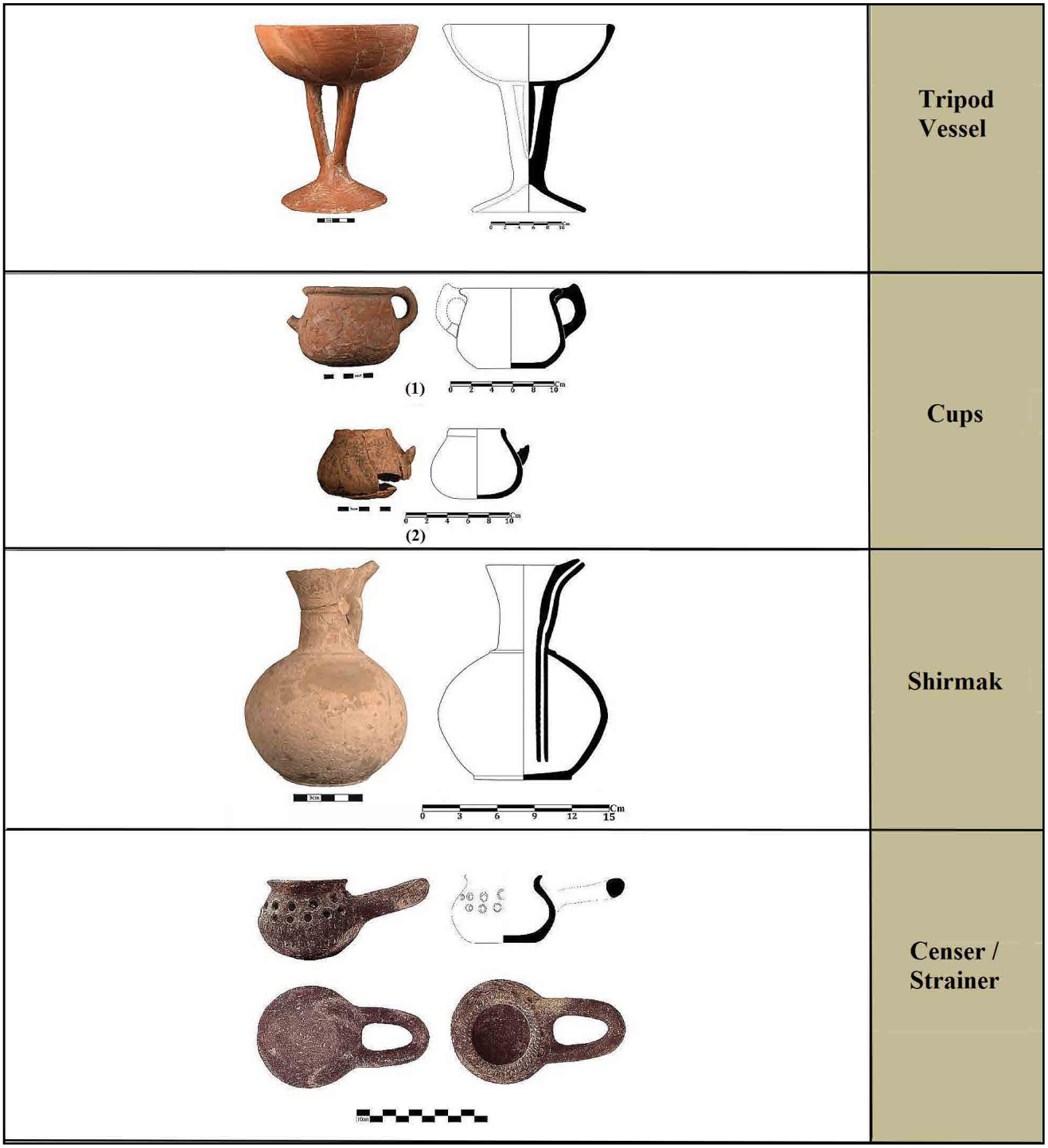
1.6. Shirmak (Milk-vase)

One of the most distinctive artifacts from Shahneh Poshteh is a type of bottle, the so-called shirmak, represented by a single example. This vessel type occupies a unique position not only within the Shahneh Poshteh assemblage but also among the pottery groups of the Iranian Iron Age in general. Since the discovery of the earliest examples at Sialk B Cemetery and especially at Qeytariyeh Cemetery, shirmaks have remained among the most characteristic categories of Iron Age grave goods. Indeed, the Persian designation shirmak (milk bottle) was first introduced by the excavator of the Qeytariyeh cemetery (Kambakhsh Fard, 2000: 185). The shirmak from Shahneh Poshteh (Fig. 6) was obtained from the burial of a child interred within a distinctive grave structure covered by large ceramic sherds. The combined occurrence of the shirmak and this unusual grave construction confers particular significance upon this burial. The vessel is light gray in color and consists of a globular body, a relatively short neck and a tubular spout resembling a reed or drinking tube. Comparable Iron Age shirmaks have been reported from Gohar Tepe (Piller & Mahfroozi, 2009: 12, Fig. 14: 4a–b; 14, Fig. 18), Tavar Cemetery in Sari (Fallah Kiapey, 2016: 37), Qeytariyeh (Kambakhsh Fard, 2000: 186; Farokhnia, 2020: 116–117, Table 1; 125, Table 2), Mian'rud in Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004b: 200, Pl. 14: 5) and Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XVI: 2, 8). These vessels have generally been dated to the period spanning Iron Age I–III, indicating that shirmaks formed a characteristic component of funerary assemblages throughout much of the Iranian Iron Age.

1.7. Censer / Strainer

Among the typical ceramic vessels from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery there is a small bowl/cup-like vessel characterized by numerous perforations on its body. This vessel may have functioned either as a

censer or a strainer based on its morphology and surface characteristics. It is also made of gray ware and consists of a small globular body; a long horizontal oval-shaped handle and numerous small perforations arranged in two parallel rows. Each perforation measures approximately 7 mm in diameter (Fig. 6).



▲ Fig. 6: Burial earthenware Groups including tripod vessel, cups, shirmak (milk-vase) and censer/strainer (Authors, 2025).

In addition, regularly arranged oblique incised lines appear on the rim, while similar incisions occur more sporadically across the body surface representing a form of engraved decoration. If this vessel is interpreted as a strainer/colander, its main difference from other well-known Iron Age strainers lies in the location of the perforations. In most Iron Age examples, perforations are concentrated on the middle and lower sections of the body, particularly toward the base. In contrast, the perforations on the Shahneh Poshteh specimen are positioned relatively higher on the upper half of the vessel. Furthermore, the soot traces visible on the body surface, and the relatively low firing quality are more suggestive of a censer-like function than of a utilitarian strainer. Morphologically, this vessel can be compared with several examples dating to Iron Age I–III, including specimens from Khurvin (Samadi, 1955: 142, No. 5), Shamshirgah (Fahimi, 2010: 181, Fig. 11), Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 116: 636) and Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. II, S570; Pl. LX, S651). Regarding its possible function as a censer, comparable examples are also known from Bronze Age contexts in northern Iran, such as Tepe Qaleh Kash in Amol (Amirkolaei, 2008: Pl. 11), Tureng Tepe (Olson & Thornton, 2019: 24, Fig. 21: e), Gohar Tepe (Piller & Mahfroozi, 2009: 7, Fig. 8: 5) and Shah Tepe (Arne, 1945: Pl. LV, Figs. 435–437). In addition, two Iron Age samples have been reported from the Gorgan Plain including Tepe Bazgir of Minoodasht (Abbasi, 2015: 108, No. 73: 19) and Tepe Sharif of Gorgan (Rezaei, 2018: 223, Pl. 5).

1.8. Cooking/ Kitchen Vessels

The final category of earthenware recovered from the funerary assemblage of Shahneh Poshteh consists of cooking vessels. These vessels are generally poorly preserved and were recovered in fragmentary condition due to their poor firing quality and functional characteristics. A total of three examples of this category were identified. Notably, all three vessels were placed at the feet of the deceased within the graves. In addition, another vessel, a dark gray to black jar from Burial no. 10, was also positioned near the feet of the deceased and exhibits considerable similarities to cooking vessels. Furthermore, the precise morphological forms of these vessels cannot be determined because of severe fragmentation and surface deterioration. However, they can generally be classified as wide-mouthed vessels, most likely representing a type of jar or small cooking pot.

2. Metal Vessels

Only one metal vessel has been recovered from Shahneh Poshteh: a bronze object. This artifact comprises several fragmented and non-restorable

pieces of a bronze vessel that was discovered beside the feet of the individual buried in Burial no. 23 and belonged to an adult male. Due to the fragmentary condition of the remains, it is not possible to determine its original form or function.

3. Personal Ornaments and Jewelry

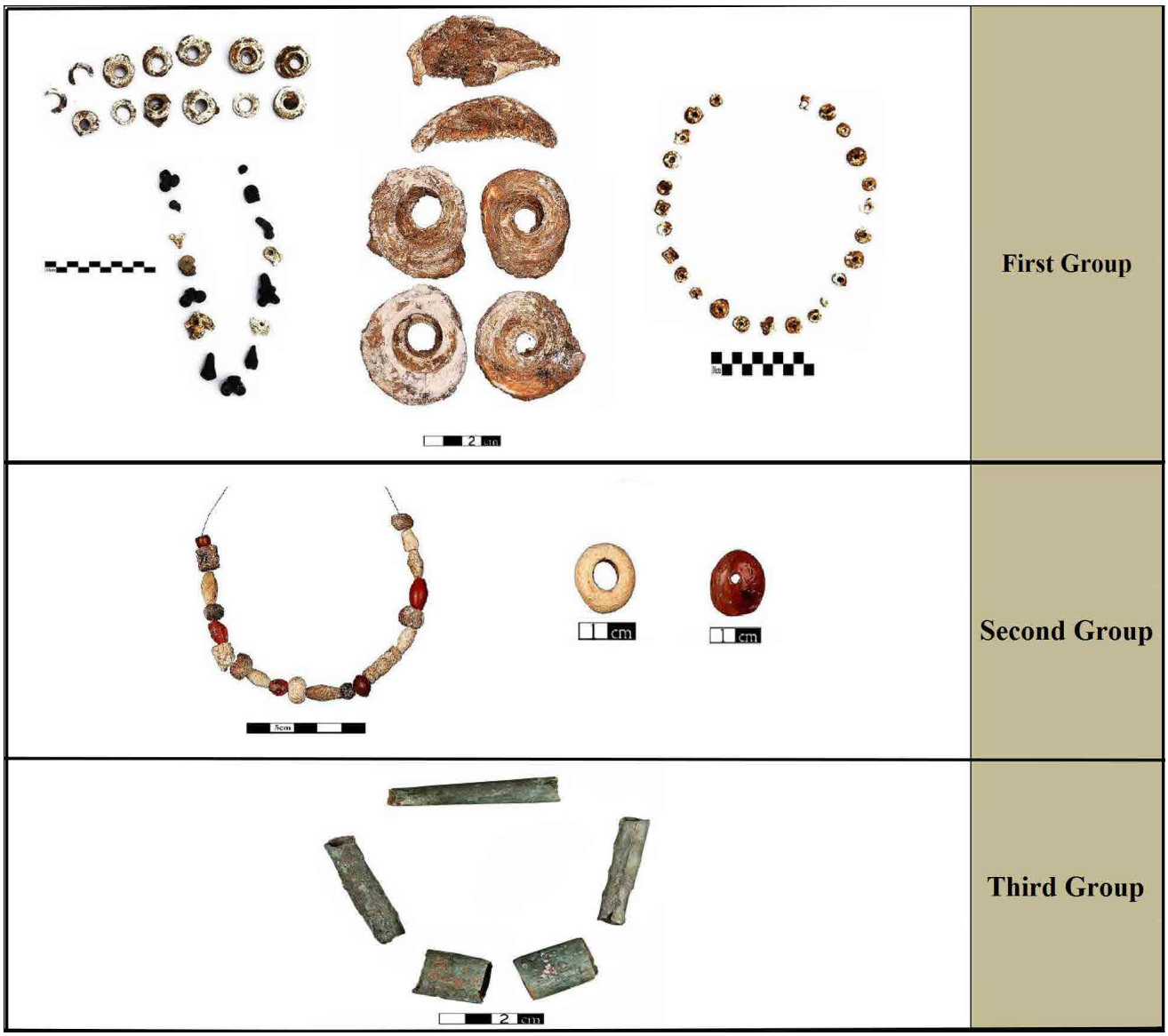
The second major category of the funerary assemblages of Shahneh Poshteh consists of personal ornaments and jewelry, which can be further divided into several subcategories. These ornaments include beads, bracelets, pins (and needles), earrings, and rings, each exhibiting its own distinctive morphological and functional characteristics. In general, ornaments and decorative objects recovered from archaeological contexts—whether funerary or settlement sites—provide significant insights into the social and economic status of individuals within their communities, as well as the extent of trade and cultural interactions between a site and other regions. Furthermore, jewelry frequently offers valuable information regarding the age and gender identities of the deceased with whom these objects were associated. The Shahneh Poshteh cemetery has yielded a considerable quantity of personal ornaments. Nevertheless, the assemblage does not occupy a particularly distinguished position compared with major Iron Age sites such as Marlik, Hasanlu, and Sialk in terms of both the quality and quantity of precious metal artifacts, particularly gold and silver objects, as well as highly elaborate decorative ornaments.

3.1. Beads

Beads, as one of the oldest forms of personal adornment used by humans, occupy a significant position among the funerary objects from Iron Age sites as well as from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery. The bead assemblage from this cemetery comprises various materials and sizes; these objects were generally used in groups as necklaces, anklets, and possibly earrings. The materials represented include faience (glass paste), stone (and red carnelian), bronze, and shell, occasionally occurring together in composite ornaments. Among these categories, faience beads are by far the most abundant (Fig. 7: Group I). Faience beads include examples with circular, semi-circular, conical, possibly zoomorphic, and shell-shaped forms. Most specimens are black or white in color, while only two examples exhibit a yellowish-cream color. Faience beads have been recovered from numerous Iron Age sites in Iran including Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pls. 71, 80: 341), Khanqah Gilavan Cemetery in Khalkhal (Rezalou & Ayremlou,

2018: 47, Fig. 1), Dinkha (Muscarella, 1974: 67) and Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XXVII: 1, 11). Their widespread occurrence demonstrates the importance of faience as a decorative element, often used in combination with metal beads. The second category consists of stone beads, which can be divided into two groups: carnelian beads and beads made from other, less valuable stones. Carnelian beads were recovered from two burials and comprising a total of six oval-shaped examples (Fig. 7: Group II). Comparable specimens have been found at Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pls. 61–67), Qareh Tepe of Sagzabad (Deh Pahlavan *et al.*, 2019: 390, Pl. 18), Sialk B Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XXVII: 1), Jeyran Tepe of Ozbaki (Majidzadeh, 2010a: 528, Pl. 308) and Dinkha Tepe (Muscarella, 1974: 67). In addition to red carnelian, other less valuable stones were also used for decorative beads. This group consists of 13 white stone beads of various shapes and dimensions. Similar examples have been documented at Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 67: 260; 69: 277), Baba Jilan Cemetery (Hasanpour *et al.*, 2015: 184) and Qarah Tepe of Sagzabad (Deh Pahlavan *et al.*, 2019: 390, Pl. 18).

A particularly distinctive category within the Shahneh Poshteh bead assemblage is represented by bronze beads, which constitute one of the rare groups of metal ornaments from this cemetery. This group includes five cylindrical bronze beads found in the wealthy Burial no. 31. The beads were found together near the left ankle joint of the skeleton, suggesting that they were probably used as a decorative element for the foot or as an anklet. They vary in size and include both longer and shorter forms (Fig. 7: Group III). Comparable cylindrical metal beads have been reported from several Iron Age I–III contexts, including Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pls. 76–77), Hasanlu (Cifarelli, 2018: 54, Fig. 5), Baba Jilan Cemetery (Hasanpour *et al.*, 2015: 184), Khanqah Gilavan Cemetery (Rezalou & Ayremlou, 2018: 47, Fig. 1) and Qareh Tepe of Sagzabad (Deh Pahlavan *et al.*, 2019: 390, Pl. 18). Finally, shell beads may also represent part of the personal ornaments used at Shahneh Poshteh. Two shell fragments were discovered near the skull in Burial no. 38. However, their precise function as ornaments and funerary objects remains uncertain. Nevertheless, comparable examples from Sumbar I Cemetery (Khlopin, 1983: 170, Pl. XI: 5), Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 74: 308; Pl. 75), Baba Jilan Cemetery (Hasanpour *et al.*, 2015: 184), Tepe Qaleh Kash of Qaemshahr (Silakhori, 2014: 159) and Tepe Qaleh Kash of Amol (Amirkolaei, 2012: 9) confirm the use of shell as a decorative material, particularly during Iron Age II and III.



▲ Fig. 7: A number of decorative glass, stone, and bronze beads from Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Authors, 2025).

3.2. Pins and Needles

One of the most significant categories of personal ornaments used by the inhabitants of the Shahneh Poshteh community consists of bronze pins and needles. Due to their morphological and, in some cases, functional similarities, these artifacts are often classified within a single category, and in some archaeological contexts they have been used interchangeably in terms of terminology and interpretation (Fig. 8). The pins from Shahneh Poshteh can be divided into three principal morphological types represented by both complete and fragmented examples. In addition, a fourth category may be considered as needle/pin forms. The first group consists of simple wire pins, some of which possess relatively pointed ends. Overall, these objects are characterized by their plain appearance, medium to thin gauge

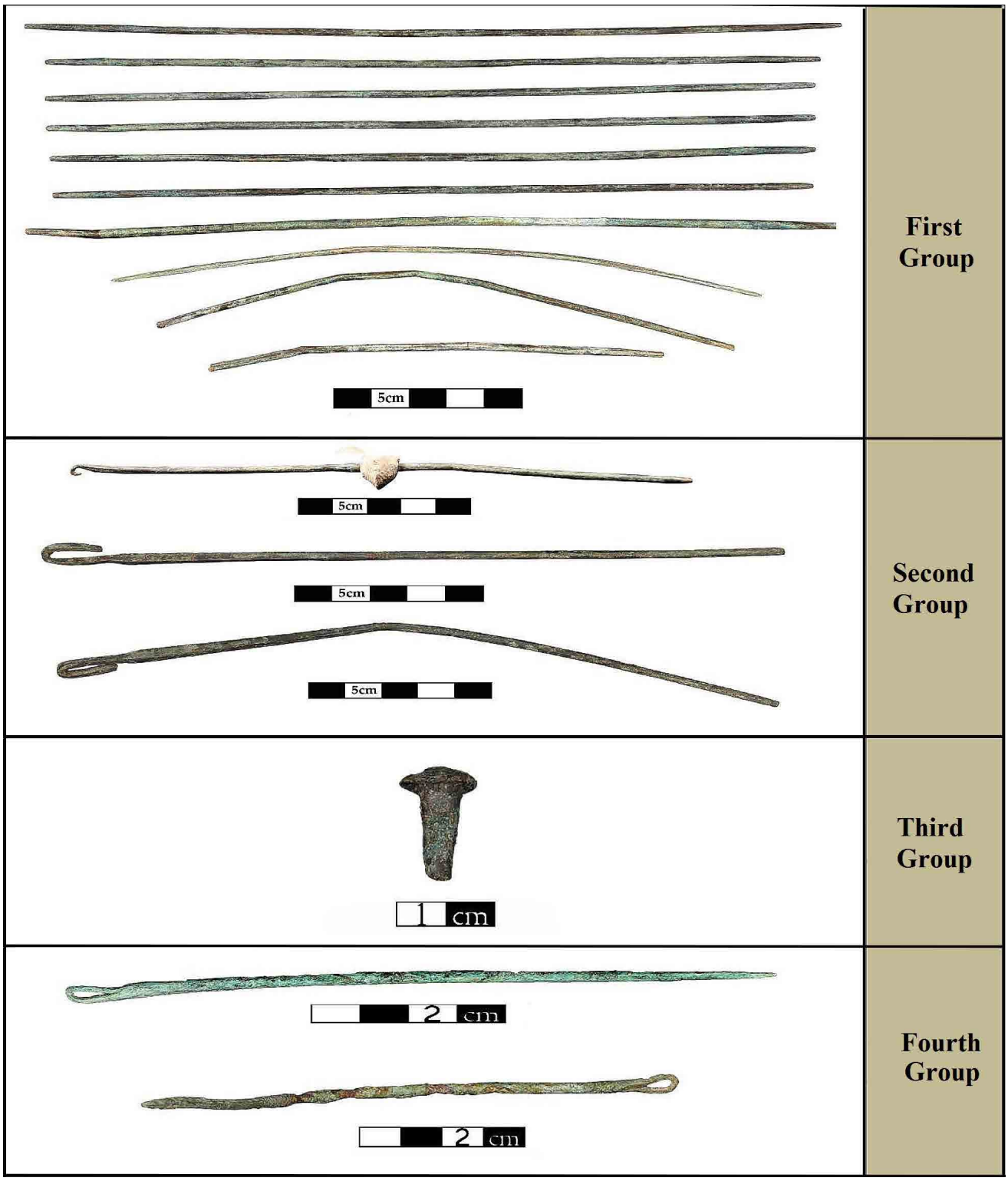
and lack of additional decorative elements. This category represents the most numerous groups of pins found at Shahneh Poshteh (Fig. 8: Group I). Although most Iron Age pins of Iran generally exhibit some form of decoration or morphological elaboration, the simple wire form appears to have been the most common type among the inhabitants of Shahneh Poshteh. Comparable examples of this plain form are relatively rare but have been documented at several archaeological sites. Similar pins have been recovered from numerous sites, including the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age I graves of Sumbar I Cemetery in southern Turkmenistan (Khlopin, 1983: 177, Pl. XVIII: 1–8; 170, Pl. XI: 8–9), Zardkhaneh Cemetery of Ahar (Kazempour *et al.*, 2017: 30, Fig. 27: 2–4) and Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 138: 969, 970). Similar examples are also known from Iron Age I contexts at Qaleh Kuti I Cemetery (Fukai & Ikeda, 1971: Pl. XXXIII: 7), as well as from Iron Age II–III sites such as Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. L: S542), Surkh Dum-i-Luri (Schmidt, 1989: Pl. 158: n) and Haftavan Tepe (Burney, 1972: Pl. Vb). The maximum length of this pin type reaches approximately 19 cm, while their average thickness is about 0.2 cm.

The second group consists of wire pins (like Group I) with one end bent inward. However, unlike fully closed circular forms, the bent end does not form a complete and regular loop but rather represents a simple curvature at the terminal portion of the shaft (Fig. 8: Group II). It is noteworthy that one particularly distinctive specimen exists among the pins of this group, in which the pin is embedded in a white biconical bead, such that this bead clearly functioned as a decorative element for the pin. The dimensions of these pins are approximately 19.3 cm in length and 3 cm in diameter. Very few parallels are known for this unique type of decorated pin; comparable examples have been reported from the Late Bronze Age cemetery of Sumbar I (Khlopin, 1983: 177, Pl. XVIII: 9), where several pins with similar decorative features were found in burials. It should also be noted that another highly distinctive example of this object type, although belonging to a much earlier chronological period, was reported from a female burial of Tepe Hissar IIB (Schmidt, 1937: Pl. XXIX: H2171). Schmidt interpreted this artifact as a spindle whorl based on the presence of two spindle whorl-like objects attached to the pin (Ibid: 120). This raises an important question regarding the Shahneh Poshteh specimen: should it also be interpreted as a type of spindle whorl rather than a pin? The third group consists of a single sample with a conical body, one broken end, and one broad convex end resembling the end portion of a pin, button or even a peg (Fig. 8: Group III). Although it was recovered from the burial of an

adult male, the object is most probably a type of pin. The only example from Shahneh Poshteh was found in Burial no. 23 and measures approximately 2 cm in length and 1.5 cm in thickness. Comparable examples of this pin form have been identified at Sialk A Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XLIV: S606c), Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 183, Pl. 18), Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 94: 463) and Khatunban Cemetery (Haerinck *et al.*, 2004a: 156, Pl. 16: Kh.B7-9). Finally, the fourth group, which may be identified as needles, consists of needles with a simple wire body, one relatively pointed end and one perforated end, which was probably designed for the passage of thread or cord (Fig. 8: Group IV). Although these objects are sometimes classified as pins at other archaeological sites, and such an interpretation may be partially justified, in the present study, we prefer to categorize them as needles due to the pointed terminals observed on the Shahneh Poshteh examples. Only two specimens of this type were recovered from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery. Their dimensions range from a maximum length of 10 cm to a minimum length of 7.1 cm, with thicknesses ranging from 1 to 2 mm. Similar pin/needle forms have been recovered from numerous Bronze Age sites and continued with little morphological change into the Iron Age and later periods. Consequently, they are not particularly suitable for relative chronological determination or comparative dating based solely on morphological analysis. The only notable variation concerns the pointed terminal, as some perforated-end pins lack a pointed tip. Comparable examples include Bronze Age needles from Shah Tepe (Arne, 1945: 298, 644a) and Tepe Hissar (Schmidt, 1937: Pl. LIII: H3141), as well as Iron Age examples from Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 138: 969, 970), Sialk A (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XLIII: S534c), Sialk B (Ibid: Pl. XXIX: 2), Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 183, Pl. 18), Khatunban Cemetery (Haerinck *et al.*, 2004a: 159, Pl. 19: Kh.B-4) and Gilvan Cemetery (Rezalou & Ayremlou, 2016: 62, Fig. 26: 13).

3.3. Bracelet

Only one funerary bracelet has been recovered from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery. This bronze artifact was discovered on the left wrist of the deceased in Burial no. 30 (Fig. 9). It has a simple oval-shaped wire body with open ends; its maximum and minimum diameters are 9.4 cm and 7.2 cm, respectively, and its thickness is approximately 0.4 cm. Morphologically, it belongs to the category of plain bracelets, as its surface is completely undecorated and lacks any engraved, incised, or applied decorative elements. Due to its simple morphology, this bracelet type has numerous parallels throughout different historical periods across Iran and therefore



▲ **Fig. 8: A number of pins and needles from Shahneh Pushte cemetery (Authors, 2025).**

cannot be regarded as a reliable artifact for relative chronological dating. Nevertheless, within the morphological context of Iron Age bracelets, the Shahneh Poshteh example can be compared with specimens from Marlik

(Negahban, 1996: Pl. 81: 348; 82: 355), Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XXVIII: 13), Dinkha Tepe (Muscarella, 1974: 41, Fig. 6: 1014; 45, Fig. 11: 1038), Sialk A (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XLII: S502), Baba Jilan (Hasanpour *et al.*, 2015: 212, Pl. 21) and the Iron Age III cemetery of Lafurak (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 247, Fig. 6-16).

3.4. Earrings

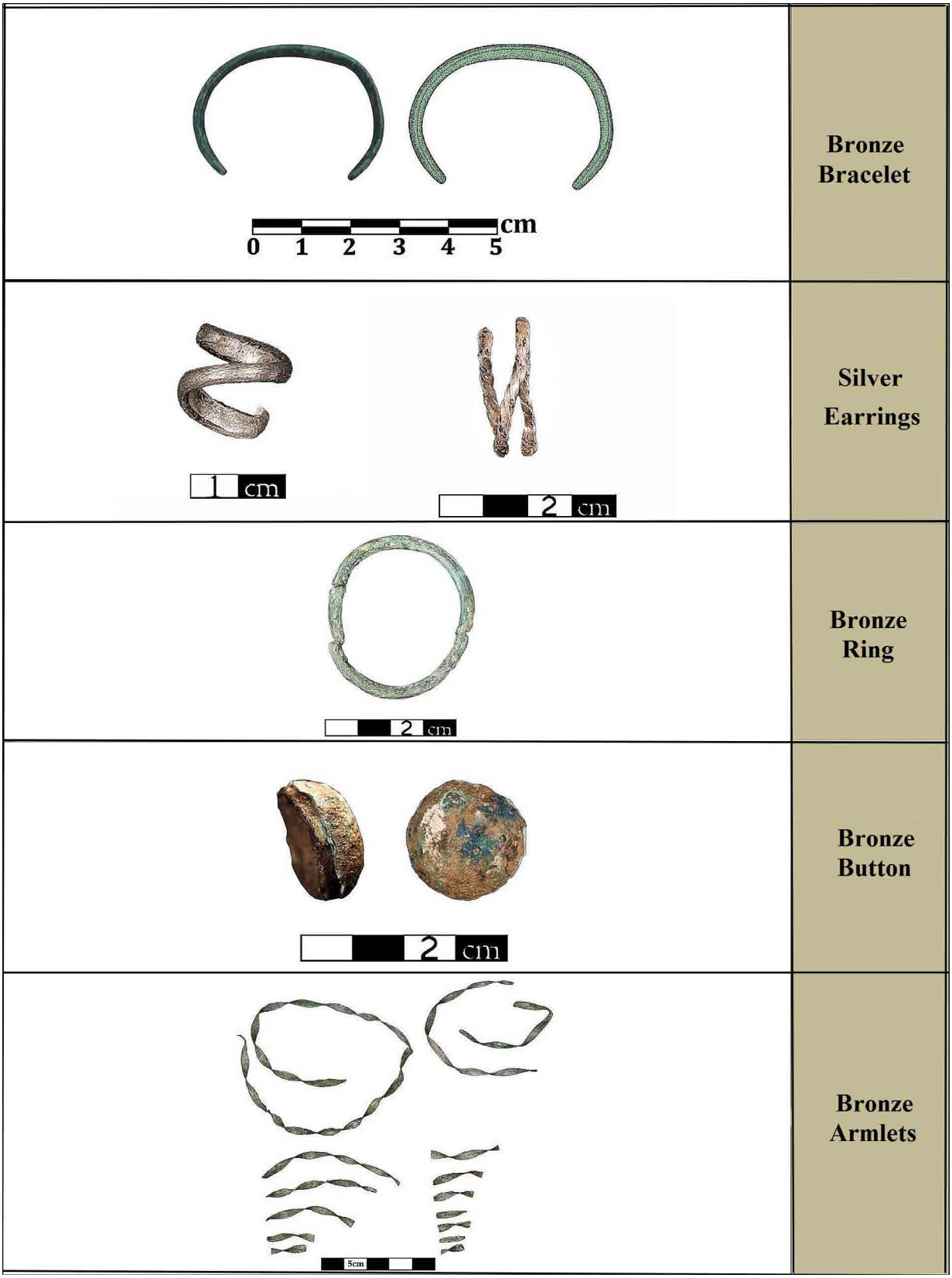
Within the assemblage of funerary objects from this site, only two silver earrings have been identified that are morphologically similar to one another and are characterized by a spiral polygonal form (Fig. 9). The earrings measure approximately 2 cm and 1.2 cm in diameter. Only a limited number of comparable examples are known from Iranian Iron Age sites, particularly during Iron Age II and III. Similar earrings or rings have been reported from Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XCIV: 1715c), Nush-i Jan Tepe (Stronach, 1969: 17, Pl. IX: b–c), Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 86: 387), Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 87, Pls. 63, 64; 88, Pl. 70; 89, Pls. 77 and 79) and Gilvan Cemetery (Rezalou & Ayremlou, 2016: 58, Fig. 20: 17).

3.5. Ring

Only a single bronze ring or decorative finger ring has been found at the Shahneh Poshteh site; it was discovered in Burial no. 27 and belonged to a child (Fig. 9). The ring is very simple in form and consists of a thin oval-shaped wire body without any decoration. Its dimensions include a thickness of less than 3 mm and a diameter of approximately 2–3 cm. This ring has limited chronological significance due to its simple morphology and cannot serve as a reliable dating object. Instead, it can be compared with undecorated simple rings known from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and later periods. Comparable Iron Age examples include rings from Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 138: 969, 970), Sialk A Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XLI: S500; Pl. XL: S465a), Sialk B Cemetery (Ibid: Pl. LIX: S645), Dinkha (Muscarella, 1974: 41, Fig. 6: 1014), and Zardkhaneh Cemetery (Kazempour *et al.,* 2017: 30, Fig. 27: 8–10).

3.6. Button

One of the distinctive and unique objects from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery is a small circular bronze object discovered in Burial no. 27, which belonged to a child. Morphologically, this artifact resembles a button and may therefore be interpreted as a decorative element of clothing or a garment fastener (Fig. 9). Although only a single example of this object type has been recovered from Shahneh Poshteh, its morphological



▲ Fig. 9: Bronze ornaments including bracelet, earrings, ring, button and armlets (Authors, 2025).

characteristics correspond to several decorative buttons known from Iron Age sites in Iran. The object measures approximately 10 mm in length and 4 mm in width, and a portion of its body is broken. Since this funerary object was found near the vertebrae and chest area of the skeleton, it may have originally been attached to the individual's clothing as a decorative garment element. Comparable objects, generally interpreted as buttons and made from various materials including metal, faience, stone and bone, have been reported from several Iron Age sites, such as the Iron Age I and II cemetery of Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 92: 439), Dinkha Tepe (Muscarella, 1974: 42, Fig. 7: 616; 44), Gohar Tepe (Piller & Mahfroozi, 2009: 15, Fig. 20), the Iron Age III cemetery of Lafurak (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 152) and Baba Jilan Cemetery (Hasanpour *et al.*, 2015: 198, Pl. 7). The main basis for comparison among these objects is their distinctive circular morphology.

3.7. Armlets

Among the most valuable ornaments from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery are bronze armlets recovered from the arms of the individual buried in Burial no. 31 (Fig. 9). These armlets are characterized by a thin sheet-like body with a highly spiral or twisted form and were found in both complete and fragmented conditions. It can be suggested that at least three armlets were originally present; based on their dimensions, two were broken and fragmented due to post-depositional damage. These armlets have no parallels elsewhere within the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, making Burial no. 31 particularly significant and valuable. Furthermore, they represent a rare and distinctive type of ornament even among Iron Age sites of Mazandaran and Iran. Armlets, as decorative elements alongside forehead ornaments and bracelets, were already common during the Bronze Age, however, their use became more widespread during the Iron Age. Comparable examples including wire and sheet-metal forms used as armlets and bracelets have been documented especially in Iron Age cemeteries like Marlik Cemetery including forehead bands and hair ornaments (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 88: 397–407), as well as from Sialk B Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XCIV: S1853).

4. Weapons

4.1. Daggers

Excavations at the graves of the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery yielded the discovery of five bronze daggers, which, notably, were found in both

male and female burials (Fig. 10). The overall form and morphology of all the daggers are highly similar, as they all possess an elongated triangular blade and body, differing mainly in the width and shape of the proximal section of the blade. More specifically, Daggers Nos. 1, 2 and 3 have a broader body, particularly in the proximal section of the blade, gradually narrowing to a triangular form and terminating in a sharp point. Among these examples, two daggers have a distinctly triangular blade shape, whereas the other two exhibit a more rounded and curved profile in the upper section of the blade. Daggers Nos. 4 and 5 are narrower in form. Except for the slightly expanded proximal part of the blade, their bodies are relatively straight and lack pronounced angular transitions. All five daggers possess a short tang at the end of the blade which served as the attachment point for the handle. This section was most likely covered with organic materials such as wood or leather. This interpretation is supported by the absence of rivet holes or other evidence indicating the attachment of an additional handle component. Therefore, the handles of these daggers were most likely simple organic constructions. Furthermore, all daggers display a raised central ridge running along the length of the blade, extending from the base to the pointed tip. One dagger is distinguished by having two parallel raised ridges on its surface, making it morphologically unique within the assemblage. In terms of dimensions, these daggers range from a maximum length of 45 cm to a minimum length of 17.3 cm, with widths ranging from 7 cm to 1 cm and an average thickness of approximately 1 cm. Overall, the Shahneh Poshteh daggers belong to the category of simple Iron Age daggers, differing from the well-known and distinctive Iron Age daggers with crescent-shaped handles. Morphologically, these daggers have numerous parallels extending from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age (from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE).

Their continued presence throughout this long chronological span with only minor morphological changes indicates a strong tradition of continuity in this weapon type. Regarding their placement within the graves, one dagger was deposited beside the hands and over the chest, two daggers (Nos. 2 and 4) were placed beside and below the feet, while the remaining two were positioned beside or above the abdomen and pelvic region. Interestingly, their placement does not appear to correspond directly with the biological sex of the deceased. Daggers were deposited in various locations within the graves of men, women and children, suggesting their funerary role was not exclusively

associated with male identity or warrior status. Comparable Iron Age examples include daggers from Iron Age I and II contexts, such as Marlik Cemetery (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 121: 727, 728, 733; Pl. 124: 786, 787, 792, 793, 796), Qaleh Kuti I (Fukai & Ikeda, 1971: Pl. XVIII), Sialk A Cemetery (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. V: 1), Sialk B Cemetery (Ibid: Pl. XXVI: 1, 5, 6), Gohar Tepe (Ghasemi Gorji, 2017: 92, Fig. 4-21: 8), Tepe Qaleh Kash in Amol (Amirkolaei, 2012: 143), Aq Tepe in Gonbad-i Kavous (Malek Shahmirzadi & Nokandeh, 2000: 192, Pl. 1), Kaluraz (Hakemi, 2017: 159, Pl. 273; 177, Pl. 12), Fakhrabad Kurgan in Meshgin'shahr (Abdollahi *et al.*, 2024: 12, Fig. 6), Iron Age III Lafurak Cemetery (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 243, Fig. 6-8; 244, Fig. 6-10).

4.2. Spearhead

Only one spearhead has been reported from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, belonging to the burial of an adult female. This bronze spearhead is severely damaged and corroded, with dimensions of approximately 20 cm in length and 3 cm in width. Based on the excavated burials of this cemetery, the limited presence of only a single spearhead suggests that this type of weapon probably held less significance compared to daggers and arrowheads within the funerary practices of the Shahneh Poshteh community.

4.3. Arrowheads

The largest group of weapons from Shahneh Poshteh consists of bronze arrowheads, with a total of 21 examples recovered from five burials. Despite their numerical abundance, these objects display limited morphological variation and can be divided into two general types. Overall, the arrowheads belonging to these two groups are highly similar, with the primary differences relating to the size and proportions of the blade and tang. The first group includes 20 arrowheads; morphologically, these examples possess a relatively long tang with a raised projection at the junction between the tang and the blade. The blade itself is triangular, ending in a pointed or slightly hook-like tip and is characterized by a raised longitudinal ridge extending along the length of the blade. Among these examples, four arrowheads show slight morphological differences from the others. Their tangs are somewhat shorter, while their blades are more sharply triangular compared with the broader blades of the remaining specimens. The second group consists of only one arrowhead, distinguished by a tang shorter than its elongated triangular blade, in contrast to the first group where the tangs are relatively longer. Similar to

the first group, this arrowhead has a raised projection at the junction of the tang and blade. The blade is elongated and sharply triangular with a raised central ridge extending along its length (Fig. 10). In terms of dimensions, the arrowheads reach a maximum overall length of approximately 14 cm, a maximum width of 4 cm and a tang length of 7 cm. The elongated tangs of these arrowheads were designed to be inserted into long wooden handles, while the raised projection at the junction served to secure and stabilize the attachment between the metal head and the wooden handle. Comparable examples have been found at several Iron Age sites such as Marlik (Negahban, 1996: Pl. 126: 840, 841), Tandavin in Talesh (Khalatbari, 2004c: 233, Pl. 13: 11), Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939: Pl. XCII: 12, 15, 21), Khurvin Cemetery (Vanden Berghe, 1964: 246) and Hasanlu IVB (Thornton & Pigott, 2011: 144, Fig. 6.5: HAS 74-437).

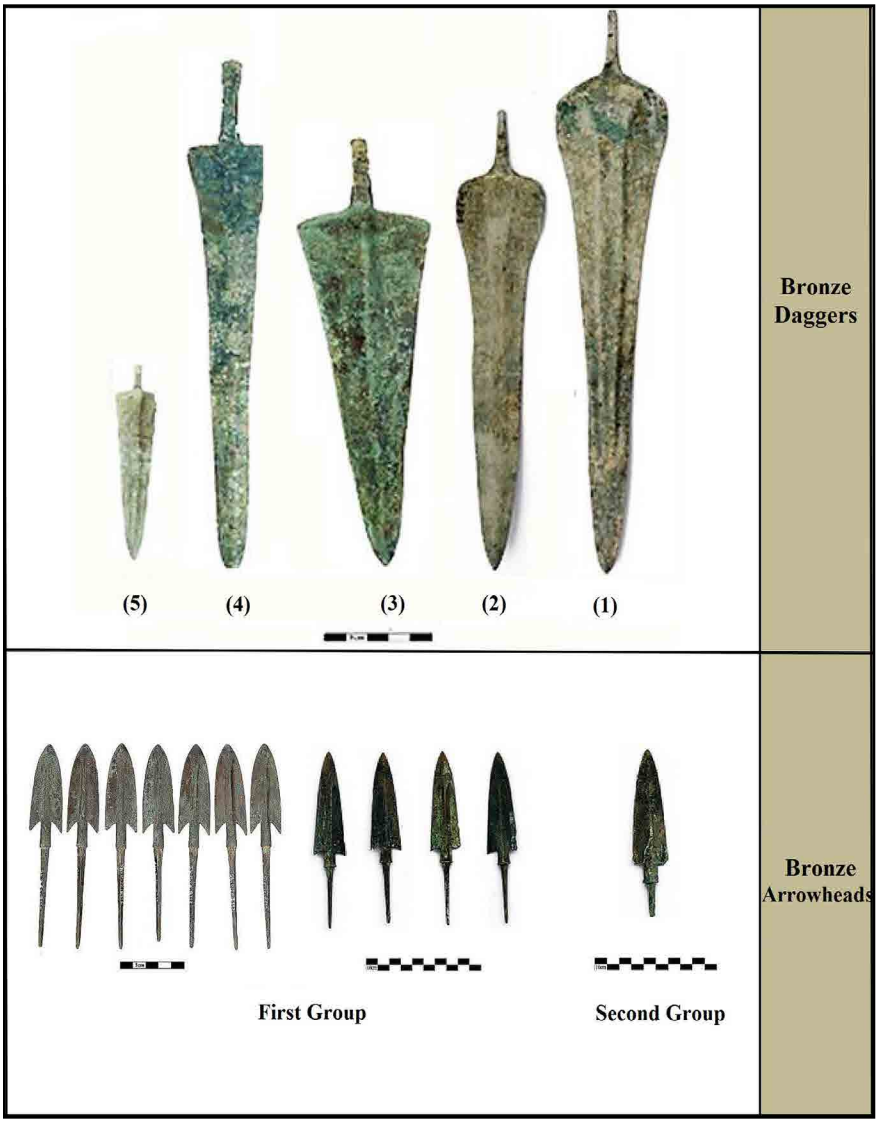


Fig. 10: Burial weapons including bronze daggers and arrowheads from Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Authors, 2025). ▶

5. Tools

5.1. Spindle Whorls

Among the group of objects classified as tools from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, four spindle whorls have been recovered. These include examples made of clay, bone, and limestone. Morphologically, as with most spindle whorls from historical periods, they possess a biconical and circular to oval-shaped body (Fig. 11). The spindle whorls from Shahneh Poshteh lack any decorative elements. Since spindle whorls have generally undergone only minor morphological changes from the Neolithic period onward, the plain examples from Shahneh Poshteh have limited significance for comparative chronological studies. These spindle whorls range in size from 2.4 to 3.4 cm in diameter. As with other tools used in everyday activities, spindle whorls appear not to have been deposited in graves as purely funerary objects, but rather as personal belongings of the deceased that had been used during their lifetime and were subsequently placed in the burial after death. Therefore, spindle whorls are among the artifact categories that are commonly found in both settlement and funerary contexts.

5.2. Grinding Stone

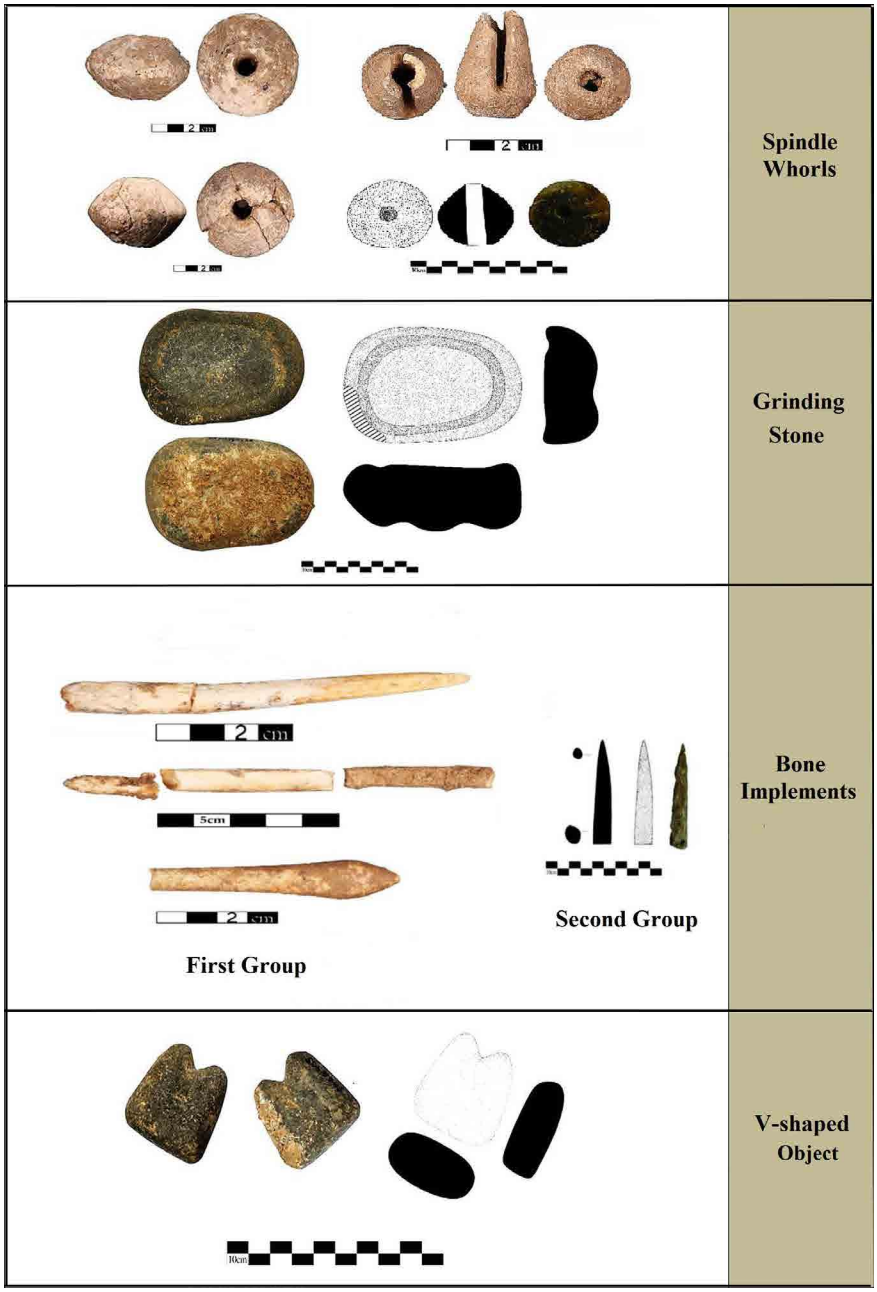
Another widely used tool in settlement contexts of the Iron Age, which is also frequently discovered in human burials, is the grinding stone. One example of this artifact was found in the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Fig. 11). Grinding stones have remained relatively unchanged in form from the Neolithic period onward due to their simple morphology and functional characteristics. Consequently, they generally hold limited value for comparative studies and relative chronological assessments. The Shahneh Poshteh grinding stone has an oval body with a concave inner surface and six small projections on its underside. A second noteworthy stone object was discovered in direct association with this grinding stone, supporting its interpretation as a tool used for pounding and grinding activities. Although a large number of grinding stones have so far been reported from Iron Age sites in Iran, their occurrence in funerary contexts is considerably less frequent than in settlement layers. Examples from settlement contexts in the Mazandaran region include the specimen from Tepe Qaleh Kash in Amol (Amirkolaei, 2012: 10) as well as the example from the Lafurak cemetery (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 152).

5.3. Awls and Knives

Among the tools and funerary objects discovered in the graves of the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, several pointed implements, including knives and awls used for piercing and cutting, were identified. Bone tools played an important role among these artifacts, as demonstrated by their relatively high frequency in the burials. A total of six bone implements, particularly awls, have been recovered so far (Fig. 11) and, based on their morphology, can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of five specimens that, due to their slender, rod-like form, can be more accurately interpreted as awls or piercing implements. The single object belonging to the second group is somewhat distinct from the others, as it possesses a triangular pointed body resembling a knife, which differentiates it from the first group. In terms of dimensions, knife No. 2038 measures 11 cm in length and less than 2 cm in thickness, while the awls have a maximum length of 7 cm and a maximum thickness of 0.7 cm. It should also be noted that in one of the burials at this site, fragments of a severely deteriorated iron object were discovered that were probably related to a weapon or hunting implement, such as a dagger. However, accurate recovery and identification were impossible due to its extensive corrosion and fragmentation; therefore, it cannot be confidently assigned to the second group (knives), and its interpretation as a tool remains uncertain.

5.4. V-shaped Object

Among the objects recovered from the burials at Shahneh Poshteh, a highly distinctive stone artifact was discovered in the burial of an adult female. Due to its unusual form and morphology, its exact function cannot be determined with certainty. However, it is suggested that it may have functioned as a pounding implement, because it was found together with a grinding stone (Fig. 11). The body of this object is approximately cubic in shape, with a V-shaped opening and one side exhibiting a slight depression. Considering its material, unique morphology, and its association with the grinding stone, it is possible that this object represents a type of pestle or pounding tool used for grinding and processing plant materials. This interpretation is also consistent with the other tools discovered in association with this human burial.



◀ **Fig. 11: Burial various tools including spindle whorl, mortar, bone awl and V-shaped object from Shahneh Poshteh cemetery (Authors, 2025).**

6. Special Finds

Among the burial goods of the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, several items can be considered special finds. One of the most significant objects is the remains of part of an animal jaw (probably belonging to a caprine species) placed beneath the feet of burial No. 20. This find is highly important and distinctive compared with the other burials at Shahneh Poshteh and was most likely part of a funerary offering. Since similar examples of placing animal parts (usually goat or sheep) as offerings within Iron Age burials are well documented, this particular funerary practice can be regarded as

one of the ritual traditions of this cultural period. Such practices continued in the southern Caspian region and Mazandaran from the Iron Age through the Achaemenid period and into the early Parthian period (Iron Age IV). Notably, evidence for this ritual practice has been identified at Bronze Age and Iron Age sites located in both the northern and southern regions of the Alborz Mountains, particularly in Mazandaran. These parallels include the remains of dogs and goats from Gohar Tepe (Ghasemi Gorji, 2017: 78, 87–89), animal remains from the Izgam Dasht cemetery in Ramsar (Khalatbari, 2018: 168), and animals such as horses or cattle from the Mehdi Chori cemetery in Deylaman (Jahani, 2014: 168, 175) and Tepe Pardis cemetery (Fazeli Nashli & Aghalari, 2015: 156, 160). These examples demonstrate the considerable antiquity of this practice and indicate its deep cultural roots within the southern Caspian basin and the Central Alborz region. Another highly important discovery from this site is an iron object fragment found on the skeleton of burial No. 4, representing the only confirmed iron artifact recovered from this cemetery. This object was in extremely poor condition and no recognizable morphological features remained; however, it was probably associated with a weapon or hunting implement, such as a dagger. Although this single iron artifact appears insignificant in comparison with the much larger number of bronze objects, it is highly valuable for understanding the development of Iron Age cultural processes in the region, the introduction of iron objects into burial assemblages, and the relative chronology of the site. Although iron metallurgy gradually began to appear among the cultures of western Asia during the late second millennium BCE (around 1300 BCE), its widespread and significant use occurred around 1000 BCE and the beginning of the first millennium BCE (Iron Age II). Consequently, alongside the long-established tradition of bronze production, iron gradually became a common metal among societies throughout the broader western Asian region (Bunimovitz & Lederman, 2012: 103) and in Iran, including key sites such as Hasanlu (Pigott, 1989: 71–74) and the cemeteries of Luristan (Pigott, 2004: 6).

In addition to this artifact, limited evidence of another metal object was found near the pelvic bones of collective burials Nos. 18 and 19, which belong to the Achaemenid–Parthian period. This object consisted of a fragment of slag-like metal material, measuring approximately 15 × 10 cm. The condition of this metal fragment was extremely fragile; large portions had become weathered, flaked, and detached. Due to its poor preservation, identifying the exact type of metal was highly difficult. Therefore, apart from the abundance of bronze objects and the presence of only two silver earrings, evidence for iron objects at this site remains limited to the

aforementioned iron fragment discovered in burial No. 4 and the possible metal fragment from the later collective burials. This scarcity may have resulted from several factors, probably the limited accessibility of iron resources for the Shahneh Poshteh community and the relative rarity of this important metal during the period.

Spatial Arrangement of Objects

The study of the arrangement and placement of funerary objects found in the burials at Shahneh Poshteh indicates that most objects did not follow a fixed or standardized spatial pattern according to their specific functions. Pottery vessels, weapons, and ornaments were placed in different areas around and upon the body of the deceased, without adhering to a clearly defined arrangement that could be interpreted as an established funerary tradition. However, two important observations should be emphasized. First, unlike other earthenware vessels, which were placed around the upper body, waist, face, and feet, jars were exclusively found around the skull, face, and upper body area. No jars were discovered near the feet or lower parts of the burials. Nevertheless, it can generally be suggested that there was no single standardized funerary placement pattern for ceramic vessels, and the entire burial space was utilized for their deposition. The second significant point concerns the placement of daggers, which were meaningfully positioned beside or above the pelvis and on the chest. This pattern suggests that daggers at Shahneh Poshteh may have been either attached to the waist of the deceased or placed in their hands over the chest after death.

Discussion and Analysis

One of the most common approaches for reconstructing the social structure of past societies is the application of data derived from ancient burials and their typological analysis. In this approach, archaeologists generally consider one or more funerary attributes, such as grave goods, the shape and dimensions of graves, or the location of cemeteries, and then evaluate the social status or rank of the individuals buried based on these criteria. However, the use of such evidence for studying the social structures of ancient societies also involves several challenges. One major issue is that the cultural materials recovered from a particular burial, along with the information related to social organization and the analysis of associated symbols, may have undergone transformations over time. Another problem is that what is observed within an archaeological grave may represent an idealized expression of an individual's social position rather

than an accurate reflection of their actual status in life (Dark, 2008: 111–112). Archaeologists generally identify the existence of social structures and hierarchical systems among past peoples and cultures through four major indicators, one of the most important being funerary practices and all related archaeological evidence (Askari Khanaghah & Kamali 2008: 225). Furthermore, architectural features, the size and depth of graves, and burial practices such as the manner and orientation of placing the deceased can also reflect funerary traditions and social customs (Parker Pearson, 1999: 5–6). In fact, it appears that no universal set of rules exists for the interpretation of burials and graves, as these practices are deeply influenced by the cultural distinctions of different periods. Therefore, the development of broader theoretical frameworks and general interpretive approaches remains necessary in the archaeology of death and burial (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008: 1). Consequently, researchers often tend to divide the contents of a grave assemblage into two broad categories: on the one hand, the body of the deceased, as the actual central element of the burial itself, and on the other hand, all countable objects that were either particularly influential in shaping burial ideology or were created as part of that ideological framework. This conceptual distinction between human remains and other objects and variables within a burial context, as well as the separation of their archaeological contexts, was established from the earliest stages of archaeological documentation, when these two categories were recorded and interpreted separately for analytical purposes (Miniaci, 2018: 1).

The majority of our information about the Iron Age, especially in Iran, comes from cemetery finds and the lives of the dead rather than from evidence of habitation and settlement areas. In other words, the archaeology of the Iron Age is largely associated with the archaeology of cemeteries, death, and burial practices; therefore, the study of the archaeology of death or archaeology of burial represents, to a great extent, the archaeology of this period itself (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008: 1). The grave goods from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery also hold particular importance, having been recovered from 39 documented and archaeologically studyable burials. These objects include various categories, such as pottery, metal and stone ornaments, weapons, and metal and bone tools, which were placed in different areas of the graves, including beside the head and face, near the feet, and in front of or behind the body. The ceramic assemblage from Shahneh Poshteh encompasses a wide range of forms, including jugs, jars, spouted and footed bowls, cups, and a vessel possibly interpreted as an incense burner, produced in

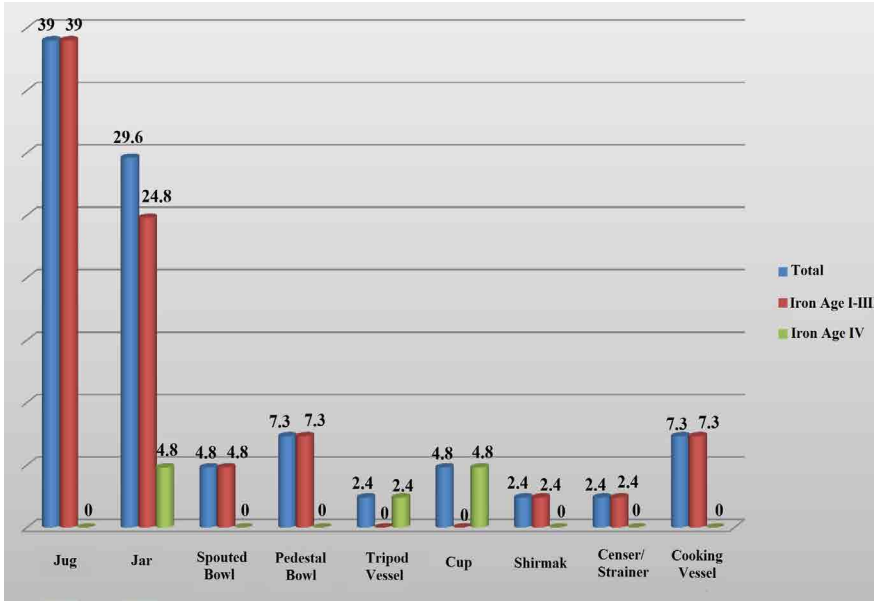
gray, red, brown, and orange-red (brick-red) colors. These vessels were deposited in the graves during different phases of the Iron Age, from the late second millennium to the second half of the first millennium BC. Studies of pottery recovered from excavated burials and surveys of the site indicate the dominance of various forms of orange-red and gray ware. These pottery groups have so far been identified at numerous intra-regional sites in Mazandaran and extra-regional sites dating to the late second and early first millennia BC. Although some of these examples differ morphologically from the pottery of Shahneh Poshteh, they all belong to the same chronological and cultural horizon (Roustaei & Koohi Gilvan, 2007: 71; Abedini Araghi, 2017: 233). Based on the limited, scattered studies of the Iron Age in Mazandaran, the ceramic assemblage of the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery can be compared with numerous sites in the Tajan River basin of Sari (Fallah Kiapey, 2016: 37–56), the Babol region (Dehestani Kolagar, 2012: 86–104), as well as the Chalus and Kelardasht regions (Heydarian, 2011: 118–154).

It can also be compared with excavated sites such as Qaleh Kash in Amol (Amirkolaei, 2009: 251; Amirkolaei, 2012: 141), Qaleh Kash in Qaemshahr (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 158), Huto Cave in Behshahr (Naqshineh, 2005: 69; Naqshineh *et al.*, 2013: 70), and Lafurak in Savadkuh (Abedini Araghi, 2017: 156), all attributed to Iron Ages I, II, and III. These comparisons demonstrate extensive cultural interactions throughout the Mazandaran region and the southern Caspian coastal area, manifested in both settlement sites and cemeteries. Overall, among the 39 excavated human burials in this cemetery, 41 complete and fragmented ceramic vessels were found, which can be examined from several perspectives. Of these 41 vessels, jugs constitute 16 items (39%), jars 12 (29.6%), bowls 5 items (12.1%), including two spouted bowls (4.8%) and three footed bowls (7.3%), kitchen vessels 3 items (7.5%), cups 2 items (4.8%), and three categories, tripod vessel, shirmak, and incense burner/strainer, each represented by a single example (2.4%). From another perspective, among the 41 pottery vessels, 36 belong to the Iron Age I–III burial group. These include 16 jugs (44.4% of the period assemblage and 39% of the total), 10 jars (27.7% of the period assemblage and 24.8% of the total), 5 bowls (12.1%), including 2 spouted (5.5% of the period and 4.8% of the total) and 3 footed examples (8.5% of the period and 7.3% of the total), 1 shirmak (2.7% of the period and 2.4% of the total), 1 incense burner/strainer (2.7% of the period assemblage and 2.4% of the total), and 3 cooking/kitchen vessels (8.5% of the period and 7.3% of the total). In addition, 5 vessels belong to burials dating from

the Achaemenid period to the early Parthian period (Iron Age IV). These consist of 2 jars (40% of the period and 4.8% of the total), 1 tripod vessel (20% of the period and 2.4% of the total), and 2 cups (40% of the period and 4.8% of the total), (Table 2; Fig. 12). Regarding surface colors, the pottery includes gray, light gray, red, orange-red, brownish-red, brown, grayish-brown, orange, and brownish-orange wares. Gray and orange-red vessels, both belonging to the Iron Age I–III phases, have the highest frequency, each represented by 11 vessels (30.5% of the period and 26.8% of the total). The brownish-red vessels belonging to Iron Age IV (20% of the period and 2.4% of the total), as well as grayish-brown and brownish-orange vessels from Iron Age I–III (each representing 2.7% of the period and 2.4% of the total), have the lowest frequency (Table 3; Fig. 13). Finally, decorative motifs and surface treatments on the pottery from this cemetery were produced through three main techniques. The first and most frequent group consists of 9 vessels decorated with horizontal raised bands. The second group includes one vessel decorated with horizontal incised bands or lines. The third group consists of one vessel decorated with checkerboard and hatching patterns created through burnishing techniques. These decorative styles were used throughout different phases from Iron Age I to Iron Age IV (Achaemenid period to the early Parthian period), (Table 4; Fig. 14).

Table 2. Frequency of pottery types from burials by vessel form (Authors, 2025). ▼

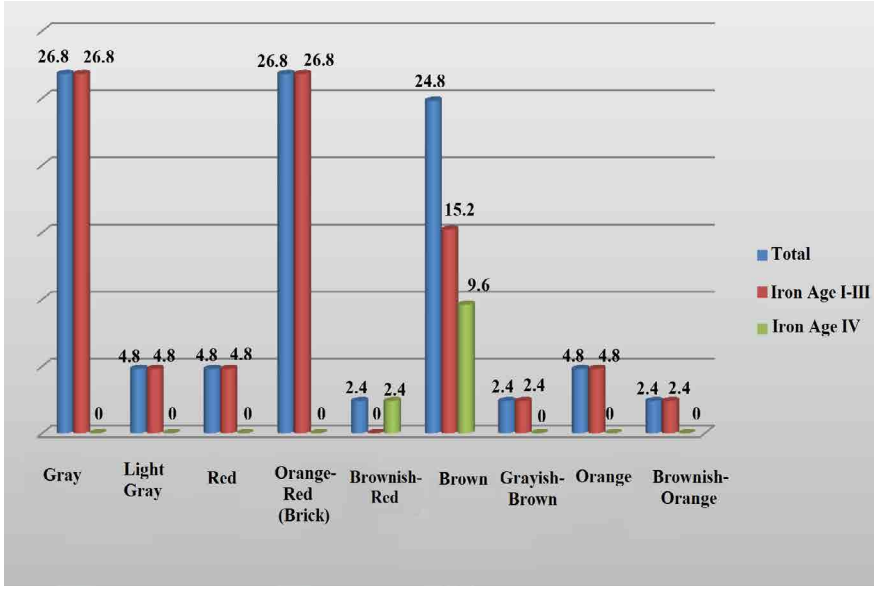
No.	Vessel Type	Period						Total of Periods	
		Iron I-III			Iron IV			Count	Percent
		Percent		Count	Percent		Count		
		of Total	of Period		of Total	of Period			
1	Jug	39%	44.4%	16	0	0	0	16	39%
2	Jar	24.8%	27.7%	10	4.8%	40%	2	12	29.6%
3	Bowl (Spouted / Pedestaled)	4.8% / 7.3% **12.1%**	5.5% / 8.5% **14%**	2 / 3 **5**	0	0	0	2 / 3 **5**	4.8% / 7.3%
4	Tripod Vessel	0	0	0	2.4%	20%	1	1	2.4%
5	Cup	0	0	0	4.8%	40%	2	2	4.8%
6	Shirmak	2.4%	2.7%	1	0	0	0	1	2.4%
7	censer/ strainer	2.4%	2.7%	1	0	0	0	1	2.4%
8	Cooking Vessel	7.3%	8.5%	3	0	0	0	3	7.3%
Total		**88%**	**100%**	**36**	**12%**	**100%**	**5**	**41**	**100%**



◀ **Fig. 12: Percentage abundance chart of burial's pottery types based on form (Authors, 2025).**

Table 3. Frequency of burial pottery types based on color (Authors, 2025). ▼

No.	Color Type	Period						Total of Periods	
		Iron I-III			Iron IV				
		Percent		Count	Percent		Count	Count	Percent
		of Total	of Period		of Total	of Period			
1	**Gray**	26.8%	30.5%	11	0	0	0	11	26.8%
2	**Light Gray**	4.8%	5.5%	2	0	0	0	2	4.8%
3	**Red**	4.8%	5.5%	2	0	0	0	2	4.8%
4	**Orange-Red (Brick)**	26.8%	30.5%	11	0	0	0	11	26.8%
5	**Brownish-Red**	0	0	0	2.4%	20%	1	1	2.4%
6	**Brown**	15.2%	17%	6	9.6%	80%	4	10	24.8%
7	**Grayish-Brown**	2.4%	2.7%	1	0	0	0	1	2.4%
8	**Orange**	4.8%	5.5%	2	0	0	0	2	4.8%
9	**Brownish-Orange**	2.4%	2.7%	1	0	0	0	1	2.4%
Total		**88%**	**100%**	**36**	**12%**	**100%**	**5**	**41**	**100%**



◀ **Fig. 13: Frequency distribution of pottery types from burials by surface color (Authors, 2025).**

Table 4. Frequency of decoration techniques on pottery vessels from burials (Authors, 2025). ▼

No.	Decoration Type	Period						Total of Periods	
		Iron I-III			Iron IV				
		Percent		Count	Percent		Count	Count	Percent
		of Total	of Period		of Total	of Period			
1	**Raised**	64%	75%	9	0	0	0	9	64%
2	**Incised**	14.5%	16.5%	2	0	0	0	2	14.5%
3	**Burnished**	7%	8.5%	1	14.5%	100%	2	3	21.5%
Total		**85.5%**	**100%**	**12**	**14.5%**	**100%**	**2**	**14**	**100%**

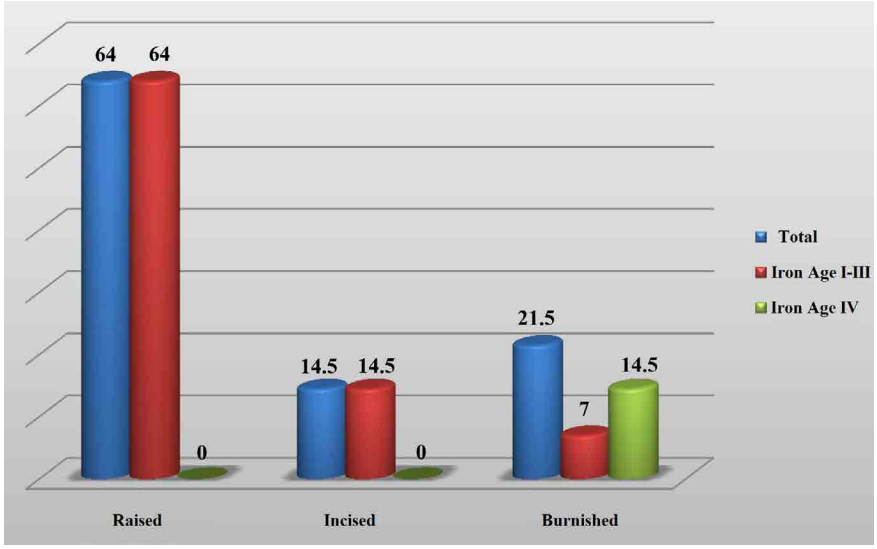


Fig. 14: Frequency distribution of decorative types on pottery vessels from burials (Authors, 2025). ▶

Alongside ceramic vessels, which represent the most important burial offerings in this cemetery, weapons, including bronze daggers, spearheads and arrowheads, constitute a significant portion of the grave goods and have been found in both male and female burials. The weapons from this site belong to the common types known from the Iranian Iron Age and do not display a high degree of morphological diversity. They mostly consist of simple leaf-shaped (oval) and triangular blades with a tang for attaching a wooden or cord-wrapped handle. The individuals buried in this cemetery were also accompanied by ornaments such as spiral silver earrings, bronze and silver pins, bracelets, and decorative beads made of faience, red carnelian and shell, which were used as necklaces, bracelets and anklets. It should be noted that pins were among the most important decorative objects used by the people of the Shahneh Poshteh community. From prehistoric times and particularly from the Bronze Age onward, pins were commonly used throughout the Near East and Central Asia for various purposes, including hair ornaments, clothing decoration, and, in their more developed forms, as implements or rods associated with cosmetic containers such as kohl applicators. The pins from Shahneh Poshteh can be divided into three main morphological groups: the first group consists of simple

wire pins, the second group includes pins with a conical body, a broken end, and a broad terminal part, and the third group consists of wire pins (similar to the first group) with one end bent inward. Among these objects, the wire implements with perforated ends can be classified as needles that had both decorative and practical functions. Regarding the function of these pins, several possibilities can be considered. The first type, due to its very simple form, was probably used for hair decoration and perhaps for fastening or arranging garments (or even burial shrouds). The second and third types, which possess bent or perforated ends, may have served similar purposes. Considering the absence of cosmetic vessels and kohl containers in the graves, they were probably not used as rods for cosmetic application. The fourth type, which can be interpreted as a needle, may have been used both as an ornament and as a sewing implement. Overall, it can be argued that the simple forms and lack of decoration of the pins and needles of Shahneh Poshteh, unlike the more distinctive Iron Age pins, provide limited information for chronological and cultural interpretations of this site. In addition, the bead assemblage recovered from Shahneh Poshteh appears to have had at least five different functions, based on their find locations within the burials. Many beads were found beneath the chin extending toward the chest, on the head, around the neck, and in front of the face, suggesting that they were used as necklaces or possibly as forehead ornaments. Furthermore, several faience beads were found together on the right side of the skull in Burial no. 31, which may indicate their use as earrings. In addition, 13 stone beads were scattered beside the right side of the pelvis in Burial no. 31 and may have functioned as part of a belt. Moreover, 5 bronze beads placed on the left ankle of Burial no. 31, along with a number of faience beads located on the pelvic bone, thigh, and around the left ankle of Burial no. 32, were probably used as leg ornaments or anklets. Regarding bead dimensions, they range from a maximum diameter of 2 cm to a minimum diameter of 1 cm. Finally, concerning the decoration and motifs on the beads, among all the decorative beads, only the faience examples display distinctive ornamental features. Some of these beads bear unclear animal-shaped motifs, while the more exceptional examples are decorated with geometric patterns consisting of wavy lines, which may represent a vegetal motif.

Conclusion

The data from the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery reveal a combination of similarities and differences in material culture when compared with extra-regional sites such as those in the Gorgan Plain, Gilan, the Central Plateau

and northwestern Iran. Regarding pottery vessels, the assemblage from this site, including forms such as jugs, jars, footed bowls, tripod vessels, and strainer/incense-burner, along with gray, orange-red and red wares, shows considerable affinities with sites in Gilan and the Central Plateau, and to a lesser extent with the Gorgan region. Likewise, based on weapons and ornaments, particularly faience, red carnelian, shell, and bronze beads, these groups have numerous parallels with Late Bronze Age sites such as Tepe Pardis, as well as Iron Age sites in Gilan including Marlik, Kaluraz, and Maryan and the Central Plateau sites such as Sialk, Tepe Ozbaki and Qeytariyeh. It appears that the Mazandaran region, as an elongated geographical region extending from east to west, was influenced by and connected with neighboring extra-regional cultures and such cultural interactions with surrounding lands were an unavoidable aspect of its historical development. Nevertheless, despite its proximity to the Gorgan Plain (associated with the ancient Dehistan culture) to the east, there appears to have been limited historical interaction between the archaeological sites of these two regions. Although some characteristic Dehistan cultural pottery forms such as horizontally handled spouted bowls are present in Mazandaran, these forms were widely distributed across large areas of Iran. Therefore, Gohar Tepe in the Behshahr region can be considered a boundary zone between the Iron Age cultural traditions of Mazandaran and those of Gorgan.

It should be noted that during the final stages of the Iron Age, particularly Iron Age III, considerable cultural uniformity emerged across extensive areas of Iran. Consequently, the burial assemblage of the Shahneh Poshteh cemetery, located in central Mazandaran, indicates extensive cultural interactions with western and southern regions of the Alborz Mountains, particularly with Gilan and the Central Plateau and, to a lesser extent, with northwestern Iran. These widespread connections probably reflect the existence of a relatively integrated cultural landscape (apart from the Gorgan region associated with the ancient Dehistan culture and the northeastern/Khorasan region associated with the Yaz culture). However, it should not be overlooked that the Alborz Mountains, as a natural geographical barrier, may have functioned as an internal cultural boundary for Iron Age sites within the Mazandaran region. Accordingly, certain ceramic forms such as tripod vessels (a form characteristic of Mazandaran and distinct from Central Plateau examples), a particular type of strainer/incense burner, and graves covered with pottery fragments may represent forms of internal cultural boundaries and frameworks within the broader cultural geography of Mazandaran, Gilan, and the Central Plateau. This type of cultural—

not necessarily geographical—framework and differentiation can also be considered for other regions, including the northeast, northwest, and even the Gorgan Plain (Dehistan culture). These areas possessed their own regional and extra-regional cultural characteristics and likely developed distinct cultural identities. Such cultural spheres may have been administered by regional centers featuring distinctive architectural remains including Tureng Tepe, Madau Tepe and Izat Kulli in the Gorgan–Dehistan region; Tepe Yam and Tepe Naderi in Khorasan; and Hasanlu and Dinkha in the Solduz and Oshnavieh plains in Iranian Azerbaijan.

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Authors' Contributions

The contributions of the authors to this article are as follows: the first, third and fourth authors each contributed 20%, while the second author contributed 40%.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that in accordance with publication ethics, all sources have been properly cited, and the content of this article has not been published in any other journal. The authors also state that there is no conflict of interest.

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عصر آهن و دورهٔ تاریخی در مازندران: طبقه‌بندی و گونه‌شناسی مجموعه گورآوندهای گورستان شهنه‌پشتهٔ بابل

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چکیده

در مطالعات عصر آهن مازندران تاکنون پژوهش جامعی در زمینهٔ گاهنگاری برپایهٔ اشیاء تدفینی صورت نپذیرفته است. بیشتر مطالعات بر روی مجموعه‌های سفالی و از طریق بررسی‌های باستان‌شناسی بوده و کمتر مبتنی‌بر داده‌های حاصل از کاوش هستند و پیامد آن، توصیف، طبقه‌بندی و تحلیل گاهنگاری اغلب متأثر از رویکردهای تاریخ فرهنگی بوده است. در این‌میان، دو فصل کاوش و بررسی باستان‌شناختی در گورستان شهنه‌پشتهٔ بابل منجر به یافتن مجموعه‌ای از اشیاء تدفینی گردید که شاخص‌ترین و فراوان‌ترین آن‌ها ظروف سفالی می‌باشد. گورآوندهای این محوطه دربردارندهٔ مجموعه‌ای از اشیاء متنوع ازجمله: سفالینه‌ها، اشیاء فلزی شامل: ظروف، جنگ‌افزارها و زیورآلات و همچنین ابزارآلات استخوانی و سنگی می‌باشند. از آنجایی‌که معمولاً سفالینه‌ها در بسیاری از گورستان‌ها از کمّیت بیشتری برخوردارند، در گورستان شهنه‌پشته نیز با مجموعه‌ای از ظروف سفالی روبه‌رو هستیم که دارای فرم‌ها و رنگ‌های مختلف بوده و عامل تعیین‌کننده‌ای در تبیین گاهنگاری نسبی و تعلق آن‌ها به عصر آهن I, II, III و IV/ هخامنشی - اوایل اشکانی، یعنی اواخر هزارهٔ دوم تا نیمهٔ دوم هزارهٔ اول پیش‌ازمیلاد هستند؛ همچنین، فلز آهن به‌ندرت از این گورستان یافت‌شده و در مقابل از مفرغ به فراوانی در قالب جنگ‌افزارها و زیورآلات استفاده شده است. در پژوهش پیش‌رو تلاش می‌شود به پرسش‌هایی درمورد گونه‌شناسی و طبقه‌بندی مجموعهٔ اشیاء، ارتباطات تاریخی و گاهشناختی آن‌ها و برهم‌کنش‌های سبکی و فرهنگی این محوطه با محوطه‌های هم‌افقِ درون‌منطقه‌ای در مازندران و برون‌منطقه‌ای در جلگهٔ گرگان، گیلان، مرکز فلات و غرب ایران بررسی گردد. به‌نظر می‌رسد این محوطه در چارچوب توالی فرهنگی مازندران دارای همگونی‌هایی با برخی محوطه‌های هم‌زمان همچون: گوهرتپه، تپه پری‌جا، غار هوتو و لفورک است و در عین داشتن شباهت‌های سبک‌شناختی با تعدادی از محوطه‌های شاخص ایران، مانند: مارلیک، قلعه‌کوتی، کلورز، قیطریه، خوروین، مرسین‌چال و سیلک، اما دارای روندهای فرهنگی و برخی سبک‌های سفالی محلی خود می‌باشد.

کلیدواژگان: عصر آهن، مازندران، گورستان شهنه‌پشته، اشیاء تدفینی، گونه‌شناسی و طبقه‌بندی.

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