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Preliminary Report on the Cairn Tombs of Kuik & Qaleh Bahadori in the Zahāb Plain, Kermānshāh

Keywords: Iran, Kermanshah, Zahāb Plain, Cemetery, Cairn Tombs.

Introduction

The Zahāb Plain is always one of the noteworthy and considerable areas in archeological studies in west of Iran. The presence of numerous ancient mounds related to the prehistoric times up to the Islamic periods and also identification of cultural remains of different periods indicate importance of this region well. Also environmental and strategic condition of the plain in order to connect to Mesopotamia is another reason of this significance. Background studies of Zahāb region dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. At that time in his journey from Zahāb to Khuzestān, Rawlinson released noteworthy information about the region.¹ After that, several studies and activities were done by archaeologists and researchers with regard to this region; however those studies had been more focused on the historical periods.² In 1968 and 1970 some archaeological surveys were conducted by Ali Akbar Sarfaraz³ and Saeed Ganjavi, respectively. Afterwards, in 2007 during the archaeological survey directed by Shahin Kermajani, many archaeological sites were identified, which had been attributed to the prehistoric, historic and Islamic periods.⁴ Following local reports of Qaleh Bahadori village about the presence of ancient cemeteries in the region, in 2015 the preliminary research carried out with the aim of identifying and introducing these cairn tombs in two villages of Dasht-e Zahāb rural district, which have not been discussed heretofore.

Due to the proximity of cemeteries to the village and commute of peasants, shepherds and nomads in these ways, the tombs were also visited by the authors; However the lack of knowledge and confidence about the security of some areas in Sarpol-e Zahāb – where is still a mine-polluted region due to the Iran-Iraq imposed war – resulted in putting off the identification and research on those area to the future.

Geographical and environmental Locations

Sarpol-e Zahāb (34° 27' N, 45° 52' E) is situated in the western part of Kermānshāh province. It is bordered on the north by Salās-e Bābājāni County; on the east by Dālāhu County; on the south by Gilān-e Gharb County; and on the west by Qasr-e Shirin County and Iraq, as well. With an area of ca. 1251 square kilometers, Sarpol-e Zahāb County includes 3% of the total area of the province.⁵ This county is subdivided to two central and Qaleh Shāhin parts which consists of six rural districts. Dasht-e Zahāb rural district is situated in the central part of the county (Fig. 1).

The average height of Sarpol-e Zahāb County above sea level is 550 meters. It has both hot and dry and mountainous climate. Climatic and environmental situations of this region resulted

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¹ RAWLINSON (1839).

² DE MORGAN (1896); DEMORGAN (1897); HERZFELD (1920); KEALL (1967); KLEISS (1975).

³ SARFARAZ et al. (1968).

⁴ KERMAJANI (2007).

⁵ KAMARI, JAMSHIDI (2013) 19.

in flowing surface water and nourishing underground water tables of the fertile plains in this county. The Sarpol-e Zahāb County is located in a relatively extensive plain surrounded by heights and hills; so these conditions caused formation of fertile plains in it, including Zahāb plain, Qaleh Shāhin, Dire, Rikhak.⁶ Meanwhile the Zahāb plain is a result of alluvium accumulation that is widespread in the middle of Jagiran river basin between 45° 42' - 46° 10' E and 34° 31' - 34° 41' N in the north of Sarpol-e Zahāb. The Jagiran flows in the plain from northeast and after passing ca. 15 kilometers through the plain flows out from its southwest. The plain surface is quite flat so that the floodplain of Jagiran is considered as its only specified feature.⁷

The Cemeteries

Totally four cemeteries have been identified in southeastern part of Dasht-e Zahāb rural district, close to both Kuik and Qaleh Bahadori villages. They were constructed as cairn tombs, located commonly in the foothills (Fig. 2). The cemeteries around Qaleh Bahadori village divided into three distinct parts which specified with A, B and C letters. A selection of the tombs is discussed below.

Kuik cemetery (Fig. 3): 45° 52' 53.93" E, 34° 34' 36.07" N, 848 m ASL. It is situated in the northeastern part of the Kuik village on the foothill of Bāy-Kowān Mountain. More than ten tombs are identifiable here. Some of them still remain intact. Several potsherds belong to the rims as well as a piece of obsidian has been identified. Between this cemetery and the cemetery of Qaleh Bahadori A, there is a rock shelter and a cemetery attributed to the Islamic period.

Qaleh Bahadori A cemetery: 45° 52' 27.93" E, 34° 34' 52.82" N, 785 m ASL. This cemetery is located between the east sides of main road from Kuik to Qaleh Bahadori villages. It is situated on the Bāy-Kowān mountain foothill. Because of looting, the inner structure of some tombs was visible which seemed almost in oval shape; however some others were filled with stones again (Fig. 4). One of the tombs measures 2 by 0.90 m with a depth of 0.90 m (Fig. 5). No cultural material has been found here.

Qaleh Bahadori B cemetery (Fig. 6): 45° 52' 58.19" E, 34° 35' 18.93" N, 838 m ASL. This cemetery is situated upper than the previous one, on the eastern side of the Qaleh Bahadori village. About fifteen tombs with different directions have identified here. Also there is another cemetery in its lower part which belongs to the recent period. No cultural materials – which are helpful in tombs chronology - have been found.

Qaleh Bahadori C cemetery: 45° 52' 52.97" E, 34° 35' 29.81" N, 832 m ASL. In the northern foothills of Bāy-Kowān Mountain as well as eastern part of Qaleh Bahadori village, another cemetery was identified. One of the tombs was different based on structure and dimensions. It seems to be larger than the others (Fig. 7).

Archaeological Data

Generally when the graves are disturbed by natural and human factors, usually no surface findings obtain. Therefore in these cemeteries very little surface cultural material obtained which were limited only to several pieces of pottery. These potsherds probably are not relevant with the tombs because on the basis of some evidences, these sites have been settlements for nomadic peoples in the past. Thus the surface pottery cannot be simultaneous with the tombs or related to them necessarily. Given the lack of pottery index, rather exact dating is not possible yet since no specific indicator is available. So it will be tried to suggest a possible chronology for the tombs, based on their structures as well as their proximity with peripheral ancient sites.

⁶ GHOLAMI (2009) 10.

⁷ ALAEE TALEGHANI, SAEEDI-KIA (2013) 173.

Tombs Structure

The tombs' morphology of introduced cemeteries seems as cairn structures. The plundered tombs help us to understand this kind of structure. They show that at first all around the tomb's wall was elevated with different size of stone in several rows; after putting the dead body, the tomb has been covered with three or four cap stones. Then the pile of stones was put on it (Fig. 8).

The location of tombs is somewhat similar. All of them situated - with different distances - on the hillsides of Bāy-Kowān Mountain. The identification of the tombs is via their physical structure as a pile of stones which can be seen on the ground; so it put them at risk of grave looters. Because none of the tombs have been scientifically excavated yet, there is no data about the burial practices; and the current information is just based on the observation of illegal excavations that have been taken place in this regions.

The comparable samples to this structure have been reported mainly from the Iron Age III cemeteries at Pusht-i Kuh including War Kabud,⁸ Gul Khanan Murdah⁹ and in some cases Chamahzi Mumah¹⁰ (All three cemeteries are located in the area of Modern province of Ilam). Other examples which can be compared with them identified during an archaeological survey in the Iron Age cemeteries of Ban Razianah and Deymah Ri¹¹ (They are located in the northwestern part of Ilam province).

Conclusion

The present study has focused on the stone-made burials located adjacent to the Kuik and Qaleh Bahadori villages in Zahāb County, Kermanshah province, Iran. In the past, there was a spring close to the cemeteries that has already been dried. According to the locals, this spring has once been the main drinking source of water in these villages. One of the significant issues is the presence of several seasonal rivers in this area. All the tombs were located in the vicinity of the rivers and on the slopes of Bāy-Kowān Mountain. Accordingly, environmental conditions and geographical contexts can have the same role in formation of their distribution pattern.

The studied areas had been robbed by looters, so the high percentage of the tombs was plundered. Therefore achieving the primary results were encountered some obstacles. On the other hands, the remarkable surface archaeological data were not found close to the areas and only sparse fragments of potsherds were identified. Due to the location of nomadic temporary settlements close to the cemeteries, we cannot cite to those rare pottery. Therefore, there was an attempt to suggest a preliminary relative chronology of the tombs on the basis of tombs' structure and their comparative study with neighboring regions. The results of comparisons indicate that the tombs conform to the Iron Age III¹² samples located in modern Ilam County, morphologically. It is noteworthy that due to the lack of ongoing archeological activities in the region and not releasing the few studies, the precise chronological condition of Sarpol-e Zahāb is still unclear. During this time, the Zahāb plain dominated likely by the Assyrian government or some local governments, however the title of the Iron Age was used here since the cultural sequences of this part of history in this region is unclear yet. Obviously the archaeological excavations can change the proposed chronology. Moreover several ancient tell including the mound of Ahmad Khan, Kelaek, Noshirvan and etc. situated in the west side of cemeteries (Fig. 9). The archaeological activities in the mounds are of paramount importance in

⁸ HAERINCK, OVERLAET (2004).

⁹ HAERINCK, OVERLAET (1999).

¹⁰ HAERINCK, OVERLAET (1998).

¹¹ DAVOUDI, HATAMI (2012) Figs. 5-6.

¹² ca. 800/750 - 650 BC. This chronology is based on the studies of Belgian Archaeologists according to their excavations and surveys in Pusht-I Kuh region. This division consists four chronological phases: the Iron Age IA. (ca. 1300/1250- ca. 1150 BC), the Iron Age IB/IIA. (ca. 1150- ca. 900 BC), the Iron Age IIB (ca. 900- ca. 800/750 BC) and Iron Age III (800/750- ca. 650 BC); OVERLAET (2005) 8-14.

order to have a better analysis and dating of the tombs and generally can clarify the chronology of the region.

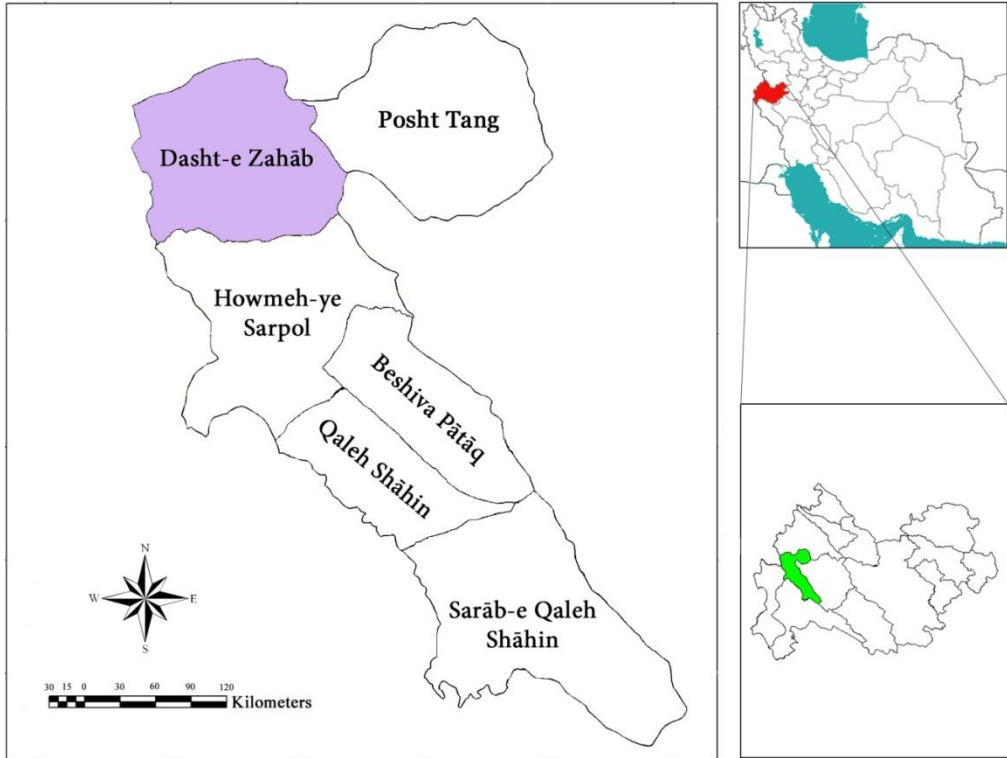


Fig. 1. Divisions of rural districts in Sarpol-e Zahāb County, Kermanshah province, Iran

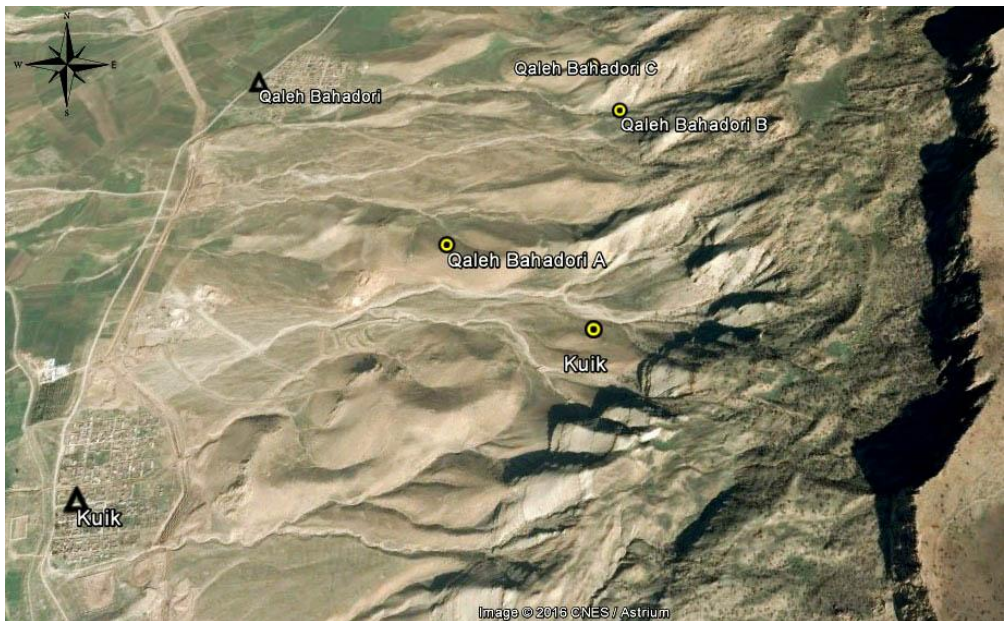


Fig. 2. Location of the Zahāb plain cemeteries based on the satellite image of google earth



Fig. 3. The area of Kuik cemetery¹³



Fig. 4. A tomb in Qaleh Bahadori A cemetery which had been filled after looting

¹³ All photos were taken by S. Nazari



Fig. 5. One of the plundered tombs of Qaleh Bahadori A cemetery



Fig. 6. The area of Qaleh Bahadori B cemetery



Fig. 7. An example of a plundered tomb in Qaleh Bahadori C cemetery



Fig. 8. The visible structure of one of the tombs in Qaleh Bahadori A cemetery



Fig. 9. Locations of the cemeteries and archaeological Tells near the Qaleh Bahadori and Kuik villages

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Summary:

Preliminary Report on the Cairn Tombs of Kuik & Qaleh Bahadori in the Zahāb Plain, Kermānshāh

In the summer of 2015, a preliminary visit was carried out by the authors with the goal of identifying and documenting archaeological cemeteries as well as giving a relative chronology of them at two villages of Kuik and Qaleh Bahadori in the Zahāb Plain, located in Sarpol-e Zahāb County in Kermānshāh province of Iran. Numerous tombs were identified in four cemeteries. Mostly they were located in the hillside of mountains. The pile of stones on the ground can be an indicator to assess them. Structurally all tombs are the same. All around the tomb's wall was elevated with different size of stones in several rows: after putting the dead body, the tomb has been covered with three or four cap stones. Then the pile of stones was put on top of it. Nevertheless these cemeteries were been looted by smugglers, still some intact tombs can be seen among them. Unfortunately, no cultural materials were found in these areas except for few potsherds; so this caused some difficulties to date the tombs. The morphology of their structure and comparative study with peripheral regions suggest probable chronology of Iron Age III for the tombs. It is evident that certain results will be achieved on the basis of archaeological excavations.

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