



AMLAŠ II. EXCAVATIONS

AMLAŠ, a small village in southeastern Gilān which, since 1959, has given its name to a large assortment of archeological artifacts derived from illegal, clandestine excavations in the nearby valleys of the Alborz range. The artifacts recovered range in date from the late second millennium B.C. through the Partho-Sasanian period, although the so-called Amlaš objects are commonly dated to the 9th-8th centuries B.C. Since most of the known objects (bronze weapons and animal figurines, human statuettes of terra cotta and bronze, pottery animal effigy vases, and burnished black, gray, or orange pottery vessels) lack archeological contexts, their dating and meaning is problematic. This is particularly true for the burnished pottery, which appears to form a more or less continuous tradition (with a color shift from black/gray to buff/orange) from the Iron Age into the first millennium A.D. The situation has been complicated by the replication of many types of objects for commercial purposes, making authentication of original pieces difficult.

Excavations in the general region carried out at Mārlik (E. O. Negahban, *A Preliminary Report on Marlik Excavation*, Tehran, 1964), Kalūraz (A. Hakemi, "Kaluraz and the Civilization of the Mardes," *Archaeologia Viva* 1, 1968, pp. 63-65), and several sites in Daylamān (N. Egami et al., *Dailaman I-IV*, Tokyo, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, 1965-71) provide some indication of probable dating for individual types of objects. Most of the objects appear to have come from cemeteries of rock-lined tombs; many of these tombs are known to have been reused in later periods, so the lack of careful excavation and recording adds to the chronological uncertainty. The



earliest discovery of materials of the Amlaš type was made further east in the Kalār Dašt area of Māzandarān where bronze, gold, and pottery objects were found in 1934 (H. Samadi, “Les découvertes fortuites de Kalar Dasht, Garmabak, Emam et Tomadjan (Mazanderan et Gilan),” *Arts Asiatiques* 6, 1959, pp. 175ff.). Further finds were made near the villages of Tomašān, Emām, and Garmābak in 1954 (ibid.). The term “Amlash” or “Amlash culture” began to be used with Paris exhibition of 1961. Tombs in the Amlaš area have produced both black and orange burnished pottery vessels and occasional trilobate bronze arrowheads and fibulae. The typology of such objects suggests a dating to the mid-first millennium B.C. for some of the material. The Mārlik finds (which include gold and silver vessels) would appear to date largely to the late second millennium B.C., while the Daylamān tombs are in a number of instances as late as the Partho-Sasanian period. Thus the term “Amlaš” covers an assortment of materials and periods. It has no real archeological meaning when used with the word “culture,” although it does indicate a geographical region from which objects of certain types come. Objects attributed to Amlaš have been shown in numerous exhibitions in Europe and the United States and may often be seen in catalogues.

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