



CERAMICS IV. THE CHALCOLITHIC PERIOD IN THE ZAGROS HIGHLANDS

CERAMICS

iv. The Chalcolithic Period in the Zagros Highlands

The Zagros Chalcolithic, spanning more than two millennia (ca. 5500-3300 cal. B.C.E.), is characterized by diverse ceramic assemblages, of which the distribution and interrelations are still imperfectly understood (for a chronological synthesis and list of calibrated ["cal. B.C."] radiocarbon dates, see Voigt, 1987). The topography of this mountainous area encouraged relative isolation among late prehistoric cultures, as is reflected in the great variety of pottery assemblages, each typically extending over only a few adjacent valleys. This factor, combined with the sheer geographical extent of the Zagros, has resulted in extremely uneven archeological coverage. A few valleys are well known, but most remain essentially unexplored. The Zagros Chalcolithic may be divided into Early, Middle, and Late subperiods. Within each several distinctive regional assemblages are known in varying archeological detail. Unless otherwise noted all wares are handmade, primarily by means of a variety of slab-construction techniques (Vandiver, 1987); they range from tan to red-buff and are straw-tempered. Only the diagnostic wares are discussed here (for more detailed presentations, see Henrickson, 1983; idem, 1985a;



idem and McDonald; Levine and McDonald; Levine and Young).

Early Chalcolithic (ca. 5500-5000 cal. B.C.E.)

This phase is almost completely unknown except in two areas of the central Zagros: the Māhīdašt-Kermānšāh valley system (hereafter Māhīdašt) to the west and the Kangāvar, Nehāvand, and Malāyer valleys (hereafter northeastern Luristan) 100 km farther east, near the Iranian plateau. Both areas lie on the old main road from Khorasan to the west. The distinctive Shahnabad (Šahnābād) assemblage, known only in Kangāvar and Malāyer, is homogeneous and limited in repertoire, consisting primarily of open bowls (McDonald). Some vessels are painted with stacked rows of solid triangles (Figure 20.1). The Māhīdašt and adjacent valleys are characterized by an assemblage characterized by J ware, a fine, thin ware with a reddish and/or black slip. Many vessels are painted with various combinations of black, red, and white horizontal lines and other simple linear motifs. The exterior and interior surfaces often bear strikingly different combinations of slips, paints, and motifs. Common forms include open hemispherical bowls and small, high-collared jars (Figure 20.2-3). J ware is generically similar to and may be derived from contemporary Mesopotamian Halaf (Ḥalaf) painted ware, though it is simpler both technologically and stylistically (Henrickson, 1986).

Middle Chalcolithic (ca. 5000-3800 cal. B.C.E.)

This subperiod is archeologically better known than Early Chalcolithic and thus appears more complex and diverse. For the purposes of clarity its ceramic history is divided into three spans: Middle Chalcolithic I (ca. 5000-4800 cal. B.C.E.), II (ca. 4800-4200 cal. B.C.E.), and III (ca. 4200-3800 cal. B.C.E.).

Middle Chalcolithic I. In northeastern Luristan the Dalma (q.v.; Dalmā) phase (contemporary with Period X at Godin [Gowdīn] in Kangāvar; see Hamlin; Young), is represented by the earliest Middle Chalcolithic assemblage, with two distinctive decorated wares: Dalma painted and Dalma impressed. Dalma painted occurs in three variants; monochrome, bichrome, and streaky. *Dalma monochrome* (Figure 20.4-5), the most common and widespread, is relatively low-fired with surfaces either smoothed, single-slipped (in dark red, purple, or cream), or double-slipped (dark on cream). Complex red, purple, brown, or black geometric motifs cover the exterior surface. *Dalma bichrome*, a rare variant of monochrome known only from Kangāvar, has red and black motifs



on a cream-slipped surface. *Dalma streaky*, known from Dalma Tepe as well as from the Kangāvar sites, tends to have a harder, denser fabric and is covered with a streaky slip. Common Dalma painted vessel forms include hole-mouth pots and hemispherical bowls. The fabric of *Dalma impressed* ware is similar to that of Dalma monochrome, but the outer surface has been impressed, incised, excised, or otherwise manipulated before application of a thick dark-red or brown slip. The most common vessel form is a globular pot with a low, pinched neck above a groove ledge, that is, a narrow, flat “shelf” between the body and neck, indented and smoothed in the neck-formation process (Figure 20.6-7). The full Dalma assemblage of monochrome painted, impressed, and associated plain slipped wares is widely distributed from Azarbaijan through eastern Kurdistan and northeastern Luristan. Two high-fired unslipped dark-painted buff wares, *black on buff* (BOB; Figure 20.8) and *Dalma untempered painted* (DUP; Figure 20.9), the latter with a finer, redder fabric, occur in small quantities in Dalma strata at Seh Gabi (Seh Gābī) and Godin in Kangāvar (Levine and Young, pp. 21-29). Both are painted with black or brown linear geometric motifs, showing some influence from the lowland Mesopotamian Ubaid (‘Obayd) tradition (Henrickson, 1986).

In the Early Siahbid (Siāhbīd) phase in the Māhīdašt, contemporary with late Dalma in northeastern Luristan, BOB is the dominant decorated ware; it is associated with a range of medium-to-coarse plain utility wares and small amounts of Dalma impressed and DUP. Dalma painted ware does not occur.

Middle Chalcolithic II. Strong ceramic localization is characteristic of Middle Chalcolithic II. In northeastern Luristan the Seh Gabi phase (Period IX at Godin) follows the Dalma phase. *Seh Gabi painted* (SGP) is technically and stylistically distinct from all Dalma wares: a smoothed, unslipped, high-fired, tan-to-greenish fine or medium-fine ware decorated on the upper outer surface with linear geometric and occasional zoomorphic motifs in a thick, shiny, vitrified jet-black glaze or paint (Figure 20.10). Common vessel forms include small hole-mouth pots and hemispherical bowls. A group of wares with thick red slip, often burnished and sometimes impressed with the fingertips, is also diagnostic.

In the Māhīdašt, the Early Siahbid phase was succeeded by the Late Siahbid phase, characterized by BOB ware and plain buff utility wares, without the Dalma decorated wares. Common BOB forms include conical and hemispherical bowls (Figure 20.11).



In the Lake Urmia basin in southern Azarbaijan the diagnostic Middle Chalcolithic II Pisdeli (Pesdīlī; Dyson and Young) assemblage is a highly varied group of wares that lasted into Middle Chalcolithic III; it includes several plain, painted, and impressed types that cannot be classified easily into discrete “wares.” Both fine chaff and fine-to-coarse grit tempers occur, and firing was less uniform than in the Dalma wares. The color of the fabric is typically light orange to buff, and the surface is smoothed matte, red-slipped, white-slipped, burnished, or a combination; impressed vessels are sometimes also covered with a red slip. The painted variety is “within the Ubaid tradition” (Voigt, 1987, p. 621) and is decorated with simple linear and occasional zoomorphic motifs in matte black-brown paint. Common forms include deep hemispherical bowls and cups, simple wide-mouth pots, and necked jars. Numerous parallels in shape and decoration link the Pisdeli assemblage with strata XIII (Ubaid 4) and XII-XIIA (terminal Ubaid) at Tepe Gawra in northern Iraq and with the early part of the long Yanik (Yanek) Chalcolithic sequence east of Lake Urmia (Voigt and Dyson).

Middle Chalcolithic III. The poorly known Taherabad (Ṭāherābād) phase (Period VIII at Godin), which follows the Seh Gabi phase in Kangāvar, is marked by a black-on-buff ware similar to the BOB ware of Middle Chalcolithic I and II.

In the Māhīdašt the Maran phase, known only from Chogha Maran (Coḡā Mārān), is characterized by red, white, and black (RWB) ware, a thin, well-made, hard-fired, fine to medium-fine, chaff-tempered red ware with a thin, streaky white wash on the exterior and, near the rim, sparse linear motifs in black paint. Deep hemispherical bowls are the most common form (Figure 20.13). Occurring in much smaller quantities is black-on-red (BOR) ware, a fine reddish-buff ware with a distinctive thick, dark plum-red slip and simple motifs in black paint on the exterior and upper interior surfaces (Henrickson, 1983; idem, 1985a). BOR is widely but sparsely distributed in the western and southwestern central Zagros and adjacent central Mesopotamian lowlands; it serves as a useful horizon marker linking Middle Chalcolithic III chronologically with the end of lowland Ubaid and with Susa A (Henrickson, 1985b).

To the southwest, in the Pusht-i Kuh (Pošt-e Kūh) region, Dum Gar Parchinah (Dom Gār Paṛčīna) and Hakalan (Hakalān), two isolated cemetery sites of the late Middle and Late Chalcolithic periods, have been partially excavated (Vanden Berghe, 1974; idem, 1975a; idem, 1975b; Henrickson, 1983, pp.



436-43). Two different wares were recovered: BOR ware in small quantities and a painted ware similar to Maran RWB, though the painting style is not closely related to that of any other contemporary highland or lowland assemblage (Henrickson, forthcoming).

Isolated examples of Susa A pottery are known from the central Zagros, but the Susiana ceramic tradition of southwestern Iran appears to have had little direct influence on highland assemblages.

Surveys in Hulailan (Holaylān; Mortensen, 1974; idem, 1976) and other Luristan valleys (Goff, 1971; Stein) have yielded a wide variety of black-on-buff and red-slipped wares that probably belong within the Middle Chalcolithic but the exact affinities and dates of which are unclear.

Late Chalcolithic (ca. 3800-3300 cal. B.C.E.)

Two stratified assemblages are known from northeastern Luristan: Kangāvar Period VII and Period VI (equivalent respectively to the Hosseinabad [Ḥosaynābād] and Cheshmeh Nush [Čašma Nūš] phases at Seh Gabi). They are characterized by distinctive decorated and plain wares, as well as vessel forms. Although Period VII probably began in Middle Chalcolithic III, there is considerable evidence of continuity between the two periods, and both are thus discussed here.

Period VII. Period VII is marked by two major and two minor groups of wares (buff and red-slipped wares, on one hand, and unsmoothed coarse and S wares, on the other). The fabrics of the *buff ware* group range from plain or white-slipped fine to more common medium-fine. Forms include everted and vertical-walled hemispherical bowls of various depths and S-walled jars (Figure 21.1-3). *Red-slipped* vessels are larger, coarser, and thicker than those of the buff-ware group and are finished with a thick, powdery, brick-red slip. Common red-slipped forms include deep S-walled jars, trays, and deep vertical-walled pots with diagnostic wavy or zigzag motifs modeled on the exterior of the rim (Figure 21.4). *Unsmoothed coarse ware* is of a poorly fired, straw-tempered fabric with unfinished, typically smoke-blackened surfaces. Almost all vessels are “perforated pots” (Figure 21.5; see Henrickson, 1989). *S ware* is similar (Figure 21.6) but is carefully smoothed, slipped, and burnished on the interior surface; most vessels are heavy-rimmed trays. The Period VII assemblage is known from northeastern Luristan and from surveys in Kurdistan; it is paralleled on the plateau in Ghabristan (Qabrestān) I (see



Majidzadeh, 1976; idem, 1977; Voigt and Dyson).

Period VI. Unsmoothed coarse and red-slipped wares continued in Period VI but in greatly reduced quantities. The buff-ware group, on the other hand, dominates this assemblage, and fine buff wares are the most frequent. Common forms include vertical- and inverted-rim hemispherical bowls (Figure 21.10, 15) of shallow to medium depth, some with pedestal bases; a row of punctate decoration sometimes appears on the exterior below the rim (Figure 21.11-12). Some buff-ware vessels were finished, and perhaps even formed, on a tournette (a flat surface turned by hand). *Painted buff ware*, a variant of the buff-ware group, occurs in small quantities but is diagnostic of this period. Its thin, often fugitive matte paint ranges from black to light pink. Most motifs are geometric (Figure 21.8-9), with rare stylized animals (goats, leopards; and birds; Figure 21.7). Major vessel forms include carinated open bowls and globular steep-shouldered pots, often with pedestal bases (Figure 21.13-14). Period VI buff ware has been found in central Zagros valleys west and south of northeastern Luristan. Period VI painted buff ware, though always associated with the plain buff wares, has a more northeasterly distribution, from the central Zagros valleys east of the Kūh-e Sefīd north into Kurdistan and eastward onto the plateau (e.g., Sialk [Sīalk] III 6-7 and Ghabristan IV; Ghirshman; Majidzadeh, 1976, 1977, 1978; Voigt and Dyson). The only known Late Chalcolithic assemblage from Azarbaijan is *Geoy M* from Geoy Tepe west of Lake Urmia (Burton-Brown). Its closest parallels are from the Keban area in eastern Turkey, Tepe Gawra XII-IX in northern Iraq, and the later part of the Yanik Chalcolithic sequence (Voigt and Dyson).

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