



CERAMICS X. THE IRON AGE

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The pottery of Iron Age Persia presents a vast array of problems, not least the huge area and long span of time that must be taken into consideration. An outline of the basic problems will be presented here, with identification of crucial sites and regional sequences. One major problem is extremely uneven archeological coverage of the territory of present-day Persia. Relatively few Iron Age sites have been excavated, most of them in the west, and the standards of earlier excavation and publication were not necessarily those of the present (for a good summary of the history and archaeology of the Iron Age in western Persia, see Levine, 1987). Surveys of very uneven intensity have been concentrated in the southwestern and central western regions, and much material remains unpublished. Some areas and cultures (essentially defined by ceramic assemblages) are known primarily from clandestine excavations, and discussion must be deferred until material from properly controlled excavations becomes available (cf. Muscarella, 1977). Second, attempts to coordinate archeological assemblages, usually consisting primarily of ceramics, with historically documented ethnic or sociopolitical groups have yielded highly ambiguous results, especially in relation to the circumstances and date of the arrival of Iranian peoples in the west (Young, 1985). Written sources are more abundant for the 1st millennium B.C.E. than for earlier periods, but even they are difficult to match with archeological data. As interpretation of both local cultural sequences and correlations among regions



is refined, historical links must continually be rechecked. Finally, it has become progressively more difficult to work with terminology established for periods and assemblages in western Persia. T. Cuyler Young (1965), building on the Hasanlu (Ḥasanlū) V-III sequence from the northwest, described three successive ceramic horizons: early western gray ware, late western gray ware, and late western buff ware. Robert H. Dyson (1965) proposed the respective terms Iron I-III for these horizons. As archeological fieldwork proliferated in Persia after the mid-1340s Š./1960s, however, new assemblages contemporary with but distinct from Hasanlu V-III were recognized in both the northwestern and central western parts of Persia. Applying the terms Iron I-III to such assemblages can be confusing if they are taken to designate specific phases of material culture, rather than simply chronological divisions. Recently L. D. Levine (1987) has proposed that they be used in a strictly chronological sense:

Iron I ca. 1450-1100 B.C.E.

Iron II ca. 1100-800 B.C.E.

Iron III ca. 800-500 B.C.E.

This chronology will be adopted here. Construction of detailed regional sequences must provide the foundation for definition and clarification of broader cultural trends.

Northwestern Persia. Although Hasanlu (V-III) has been the key site for establishing Iron Age chronology, the pottery from other northwestern sites has been more extensively published, particularly that from [Dinkha \(Denkā\) Tepe](#) (Muscarella, 1974), [Agrab \(‘Aqrab\) Tepe](#) (Muscarella, 1973), and [Baštām \(Bestām; Kroll\)](#). In Hasanlu V (Iron I) the appearance of early western gray ware marked a complete break with local Late Bronze ceramic traditions (see vii, above); on the other hand, this burnished gray ware is generally thought to have been derived from somewhat similar wares of the Late Bronze Age in the northeast (Young, 1965; idem, 1967; idem, 1985; Dyson; see i, ix, above). In this period there is a notable typological homogeneity among far-flung sites in the northwest (Young, 1965; idem, 1985; Muscarella, 1974; Vanden Berghe, 1964; cf. Medvedskaya). In Hasanlu IV (Iron II) late western gray ware developed from the early gray ware of the preceding period, but considerably greater regional variability is apparent (Young, 1965; idem, 1985; Dyson; Muscarella, 1974).

The late western buff ware of Hasanlu III (Iron III) presents a more complex problem than was originally recognized. Even in the northwest this period is



characterized by two distinct ceramic phenomena; in central western Persia the situation is even more fragmented. The predominant pottery of early Hasanlu IIIB is a plain red-slipped ware (Levine, 1987; Muscarella, 1973) that is better known from Urartian sites farther north (Kroll) and is also found in eastern Turkey. In later Hasanlu IIIB it was largely replaced by Triangle Ware, a buff pottery painted with crosshatched triangles, which continued to develop in Hasanlu IIIA. Triangle ware has been found throughout much of northwestern and central western Persia, providing a horizon marker (Levine, 1987).

Central western Persia. The original association of ceramics from the central western part of the country with the northwestern sequence of early and late western gray ware and late western buff ware was based on a reanalysis of finds from graves in Tepe Giyan (Gīān) II-I (Young, 1965; Contenau and Ghirshman). Although sherds of both phases of gray ware have been found in surveys of a limited number of sites in the northern tier of Zagros valleys (Young, 1966; idem, 1975; Levine, 1976), excavations in the same area have revealed a number of local sequences (Young, 1985; Levine, 1987), particularly at Baba Jan (*Bābā Jān*; Goff, 1978; idem, 1985), Nush-i Jan (*Nūš-e Jān*, Stronach), Godin (Gowdīn) Tepe (Young, 1969; Young and Levine), Jameh Shuran (*Jāmašūrān*; Levine, 1987), Tepe Guran (*Gūrān*; Meldgaard et al.), Surkh Dum (*Sork-dom*; Schmidt et al.), and Tepe Giyan (Contenau and Ghirshman).

Analysis of the Godin III finds and consequent reinterpretation of those from Giyan suggest that the nondescript terminal assemblage of Godin III (characterized by simple shapes in handmade coarse buff ware without decoration; Henrickson, 1984) lasted well into the Iron I period (Henrickson, 1983-84). Gray ware thus probably did not replace an earlier assemblage but instead represents contact with the north contemporary with a continuing Bronze Age tradition. Simultaneously in many of the central western valleys tall, slender goblets made from a distinctive white paste appeared (Meldgaard et al.; Goff, 1966; idem, 1968; Henrickson, 1983-84; Levine, 1987). An ultimate origin in either Elamite or Kassite ceramics has been suggested, but the former seems more likely in view of the Elamite resurgence in the late 2nd millennium (Henrickson, 1983-84; Carter, 1984).

Early in the 1st millennium B.C.E. (Iron III) regional assemblages appeared in various parts of western Persia. For example, in central Luristan the “genre Luristan” (= Baba Jan III; Goff, 1978; cf. idem, 1968) includes simple handmade buff-ware vessels with distinctive painted decoration consisting of pendant



hatched diamonds and other geometric motifs. In Baba Jan I it was replaced by a well-made plain buff ware (Goff, 1985). Similar material is well known from farther east, at Nush-i Jan in Malāyer (Stronach), and a contemporary or slightly later version of the same tradition has been found in Godin period II, in Kangāvar, and at Jameh Shuran in the Māhīdašt (Young, 1969; Young and Levine; Levine, 1987; Brown). A profuse variety of bowls with ledge or beaded rims is noteworthy. At least in this region the assemblage may be associated with the Medes. Almost no graves from the 2nd millennium are known in Pošt-e Kūh, but cemeteries of the 1st millennium have yielded abundant pottery, consisting of simple shapes made from a coarse buff ware and including parallels to the contemporary Elamite assemblage in Susiana (Vanden Berghe, 1972; idem, 1973a; idem, 1973b; idem, 1977).

Southwestern Persia and Fārs (see viii, above).

Kermān. Period III at Tepe Yahya (Yaḥyā) in the Soghun (Şawgān) valley is dated to the late 2nd or early 1st millennium B.C.E. Red and gray burnished wares and a grey-ware bridged spout suggest a range of dates in Iron I-II (Lamberg-Karlovsky, pp. 27-33).

Northeastern Persia. Although the Late Bronze Age gray burnished wares of the northeast have been proposed as the origin of western gray ware (see i, ix, above), there is very limited evidence from the Iron Age, particularly the late 2nd millennium, in the same region. At Tureng (Tūrang) Tepe, after a long break in ceramic production, red and gray-black burnished pottery appeared in VA-IV, dated to late Iron II-III (Deshayes, p. 170). Yarim Tepe also yielded an Iron Age sequence (Crawford). The pottery from the [Atrak](#) region belonged to the Turkmenistan sequence (Venco Ricciardi).

Persian plateau. Excavations at Tepe Sialk (Sīalk), near Kāšān, revealed two cemeteries (Sialk V and VI, necropolises A and B respectively), dated by the excavator after the mid-2nd millennium B.C.E. (Ghirshman), though there have been continual attempts to refine this dating. The Sialk V graves yielded burnished gray ware, whereas Sialk VI graves contained fine buff vessels with shapes clearly based on metal prototypes; their entire surfaces are painted with elaborate geometric and naturalistic designs in reddish brown.



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