



IRON AGE

IRON AGE. In Iran the term Iron Age is employed to identify a cultural change that occurred centuries earlier than the time accorded its use elsewhere in the Near East, and not to acknowledge the introduction of a new metal technology. Iron artifacts, in fact, were unknown in Iran until the 9th century B.C.E. (the cultural period labeled Iron Age II), centuries after the phase designated as Iron Age I came into existence. Iranian sites with levels identified as dating to the Iron Age were first excavated in western Iran at Sialk (Cemetery A) and Giyan (q.v. [Giān]; Level 1), and later in northwestern Iran around the west, east, and south shores of Lake Urmia, close to the Zagros mountains bordering Mesopotamia and Anatolia. These sites remain to date the best-documented full-range Iron Age sites in western Iran.

Written sources are rare at Iranian Iron Age sites, and locally written texts are non-existent. Indirect historical reference to the region begins in the 9th century B.C.E., when Assyrian royal texts first refer to various polities in northwestern and western Iran; these references continued into the 7th century. However, relating the Assyrian-named polities with on-the-ground sites is difficult; in fact, not one excavated Iranian Iron Age site has been conclusively identified by its ancient name—although suggested identifications have been brought forth.

Several Urmia sites, namely, Ḥasanlu (q.v.), Dinkha Tepe (see DENKĀ TEPE), Geoy (q.v.), and Kordlar, have underlying Bronze Age settlements dating from the early to about the mid-2nd millennium B.C.E. At Ḥasanlu (Period VI) and Dinkha Tepe (Period V) architecture was uncovered along with a distinctive



painted, geometric pottery known extensively to the west in Syria and northern Mesopotamia as Khabur Ware. The Urmia sites clearly shared the ceramic culture, and possibly the ethnos, of its counterparts across the Zagros. This period, normally Middle Bronze Age, was designated Late Bronze Age—given the Iron Age terminology assigned to the immediately succeeding cultural period (see below).

Directly over the ruins of these Bronze Age levels were uncovered new forms of structures together with a new artifact repertory. The Bronze Age culture ceased to exist, evidence of fire at Dinkha Tepe perhaps indicating a violent destruction. Cultural change was abrupt; a manifest intrusion from elsewhere had occurred. Ḥasanlu (Period V), Dinkha Tepe (Period III), and Kordlar (Period IV) have revealed stratigraphical developments and changes and contain the best-preserved record of the Bronze Age and succeeding periods in western Iran. Of these, Ḥasanlu has provided the most extensive information. Substantial freestanding structures are preserved at Ḥasanlu and Kordlar, and cemeteries have been excavated at Ḥasanlu and Dinkha Tepe; the latter has provided the most extensive repertory of the Bronze Age and immediately following burials and pottery. A cultural break after the Bronze Age also is documented in the Godin (Gowdin) area, near Kangāvar, but when it commenced is not clear; this new culture differs from that of Urmia.

One building at Ḥasanlu preserved two columns, a bench along the interior walls, and a central hearth. What social classes lived here is not clear; but, as with the later period, they were presumably elites. In the earlier Bronze Age cultural period intramural, multiple burials existed, but now extramural cemeteries with single burials (except at Geoy) were the rule. Further, and significant for cultural and chronological identification, burnished, monochrome, usually grey, sometimes red, ware with highly distinctive shapes appear in the region for the first time; the original archeological term for this period was “Early Western Grey Ware” horizon. The characteristic pottery forms consist of a vessel with a spout that does not connect to the rim (unbridged), a shallow bowl with a small curved ridge in its interior (“worm bowl”), and a one-handled and splay-footed goblet. These three forms occur together at several Urmia sites: Ḥasanlu, Dinkha Tepe, Kordlar, Hajji Firuz (Ḥāji Firuz), Geoy, and Haftavān. One or two of the forms occur in burials at Godin, Giyan I, and Sialk A, to the south, where they may either have been imported or in fact represent a limited southernmost extension of the culture. They are also found at sites farther to the east, south of the Caspian and close



to Tehran: at Mārlik, Khurvin (K̄urvin), Gheyтарыeh (Ġaytariya), and Darrus. The Urmia sites are settlements and cemeteries; the others mentioned are cemetery sites, their settlements still unrecorded.

At least two of the Ḥasanlu V buildings preserve evidence of several burnings across time; and at contemporary Kordlar (Period IV) a multi-roomed elite structure with a column was also destroyed by fire. These burnings occurred sometime around 1200 and surely indicate local conflicts and destructions, but whether caused by local upheavals or intrusive forces is unknown, especially since the grey ware ceramic assemblage continued without interruption.

The origin of this intrusive culture and its population is still debated. Some scholars argue for an origin in northeastern Iran and beyond, at the sites in Gorgān Province to the southeast of the Caspian, because of the earlier presence there of monochrome grey pottery and unbridged spouted vessels; the presence of this ware at sites south of the Caspian Sea is brought in for support of the east-west migration route. Without texts one cannot discuss what language(s) was spoken here, but some scholars speak of a migration of Indo-European speakers, predecessors of the Medes and Persians being involved—they are first recorded present in western Iran in 9th-century Assyrian texts (see [ASSYRIA i](#)); other scholars suggest a migration from the Caucasus, which is less certain.

The defining site for the next architectural level is Ḥasanlu Period IV; it is the outstanding site in all western Iran for archeological documentation of the period, including architecture, artifacts, and burials; followed by Kordlar (Period I), and the cemetery at Dinkha Tepe (Period II). The architecture built directly over the Period V ruins at Ḥasanlu consisted of several buildings monumental in size and furnishings, forming a compound of 1,000 square meters that over time was embellished with architectural additions, courts, a gate, and storage rooms. The buildings all had a central hall with double rows of columns, benches along the walls, a central hearth—features repeating those from the earlier Period V. Building II, the largest and the richest in artifact inventory (some 1,500 artifacts), was either a palace or temple, possibly the latter; but all the columned halls were elite, labor-intensive structures, built to serve a powerful ruling class and their deities as well. Houses of ordinary citizens have yet to be recovered from this and the preceding period, as the outer town remains unexcavated; and no fortification wall has been recovered for the citadel.



The columned-hall buildings and compound at Hasanlu are the earliest such buildings known to date in Iran, surpassed in monumental qualities only later at Persepolis. They are rightly considered to have been the source for the large columned-hall buildings built in the late 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. to the southeast at the probably Median sites of Nush-i Jan (Nuš-e Jān) and Godin II, and later by the Achaemenid Persians to the south at Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Susa (see [APADĀNA](#)). Whether this reflects stimulus diffusion or major human—Persian, Indo-European-speaking—movements remains under review.

From the Dinkha Tepe and Hasanlu cemeteries and the Hasanlu destroyed structures were recovered many thousands of artifacts mundane and elite, many locally made, some imported from Mesopotamia and elsewhere in Iran. The local artifacts are made of bronze, iron, gold, silver, ivory, glass, stone, shell, and so forth, demonstrating the great wealth and power of the polity (many Hasanlu artifacts remain unpublished); iron artifacts—a great many, in fact—appear for the first time in this period. Monochrome grey ware pottery of Period V continued in use throughout Period IV, the spouted beaker now furnished with a bridge to the vessel's rim. Hence the period was originally called “Late Western Grey Ware,” horizon.

Hasanlu IV experienced a major destruction and complete rebuilding directly upon the original structures' foundation walls about 100 (?) years after the initial building. In about 800 B.C.E. a violent, total destruction occurred that left hundreds dead in the ruins and thousands of artifacts buried under the collapsed walls of the structures. Kordlar also experienced multiple destructions. This was the total and abrupt end of a long-lasting culture.

Within a few years of excavation it was recognized that Hasanlu Periods V and IV formed a continuity of the same culture, and probably polity and population, in existence over many centuries. Precisely to reflect this cultural continuity across time, including the survival of the ca. 1200 destruction that distinguished Periods V and IV in the first place, and the subsequent ca. 1100 B.C.E. destruction, a new terminology was introduced in 1965 (by R. H. Dyson and T. C. Young). Hasanlu V was labeled Iron Age I (not Late Bronze), and IV Iron Age II.

The destroyers of Hasanlu IV were probably Urartians from the northwest, who at some time in the 8th century B.C.E. built a walled settlement over the ruins—Hasanlu IIIB (unpublished); Dinkha Tepe was abandoned. The Ur-



artians first constructed a fortified settlement at Qalatgāh, near Dinkha Tepe, where an *in situ* inscription of ca. 800 B.C.E. yielded important information of their conquests in the Urmia area; another, slightly later, inscription was found at Tash Tepe (Tāš Tappa), east of Ḥasanlu. Assyrian texts record that in 715 B.C.E. Cimmerians from the north arrived in northwest Iran, and that a year later the Assyrian king Sargon II defeated the Urartians in the Urmia area. Urartian Ḥasanlu IIIB apparently survived; but later, in the second half of the 7th century, it and the Urartian fort at nearby Agrāb Tepe was destroyed. The subsequent settlement at Ḥasanlu was labeled appropriately Ḥasanlu IIIA; defining it is the introduction of painted wares, appearing for the first time in centuries. Qalatgāh, Ḥasanlu IIIB, and Agrāb Tepe represent the southernmost area of Urartian hegemony. Together with Ḥasanlu IIIA, their 8th and 7th century dates define the chronology (with different cultures) of the Urmia Iron Age III period. The tumulus burials at Sé Girdan (Se Gerdān), near Dinkha Tepe, were not, as originally interpreted, from this time, but are millennia earlier, Maikop period burials.

Originally, the terms Iron Age I and II related specifically to cultures in northwestern Iran and the central Caspian Sea area. Nevertheless, Urmia terminology and chronology were adapted for the Bronze-Iron Age (Iron Age 1-III) cultural divisions elsewhere in western Iran, except for the southern Elamite sites. This was not always uniform or successful—for example, attempts to define the correct chronology, beginning and termination, Iron Age II or III, at the cemetery sites of Sialk B where painted wares existed, and the chronology of related wares at Giyan. There are arguments about the division to be assigned to sites such as Bābā Jān and its painted “genre Luristan” pottery—Iron Age II or (early?) III. In Luristan (Lorestān), which has its own distinct culture and stylistic characteristics across time, there are a good number of late second and first millennium B.C.E. sites; these are primarily cemeteries, but one important Iron Age site exists at Surkh Dum (Sorkdom). Here both local and Urmia terminology and chronology have been employed by archeologists to define these sites. The issues concern whether sites dated ca. 1400-1350 and later, or only those dated after ca. 1200 B.C.E., should be labeled Iron Age I, or whether the earlier date should qualify as Late Bronze Age. In the latter situation, Late Bronze Age in Luristan would chronologically be equivalent to Iron Age I in Urmia, and Iron Age I in Luristan would be chronologically equivalent to Iron Age II in Urmia (as Overlaet, 2003; but compare Schmidt et al., 1989, pp. 486 ff.).



The Iron Age III period is dated throughout western Iran after 800 to ca. 600 B.C.E.—here in natural harmony with Urmia chronology and terminology. Important sites such as Nush-i Jan, Godin II, Bābā Jān, and the excavated site of Ziwiye flourished during this time. Characteristic of the Iron III period in western Iran (known mostly from surveys) is the presence of many local ceramic assemblages consisting of both plain and painted wares, indicating a variety of regional developments, perhaps indicating discrete polities.

The term Iron IV was introduced to define plain pottery in central western Iran of what seems to be pre-Parthian, Achaemenid period in time. Later it came to include painted pottery in the Urmia area (Ḥasanlu IIIB), suggesting that the earlier IIIB period alone equals Iron Age III! Most of the non-Urmia evidence derives from surveys, and it is possible that pottery other than Achaemenid has been included in this category. The term therefore is used chronologically, not specifically culturally.

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