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JIROFT III. GENERAL SURVEY OF EXCAVATIONS
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For archeological accuracy the terms “Jiroft” or “Jiroft culture” employed to define a specific ancient Iranian culture and its artifacts should only be cited within quotation marks. All the artifacts known to date that are accorded the Jiroft label have not been excavated; they have in fact been plundered. The plundering seems to have occurred at half a dozen now destroyed cemeteries, none at the modern city of Jiroft in Kerman province in southern Iran, but at loci distanced ca. 28 to ca. 50 km to its south. A number of artifacts have been confiscated from interior thieves and smugglers by local and state authorities at several distant locations within Iran, including Jiroft itself, and others have been confiscated in Europe. In the past year a handful of artifacts have been mentioned as having been excavated by archeologists at tepes within the plundered area (below). Aside from their orphaned, unprovenienced situation, apparently deriving from multiple cemetery sites, all the material remains, baptized by their plunderers and purchasers as “Jiroft antiquities” and accorded the Jiroft cultural appellation both in the popular media and scholarly reports, are known solely from two venues. One is the published popular media reports of the police confiscations in Iran and Europe; the other is their presence in museum, dealer, and collector possessions in many countries, courtesy of the destroyers and smugglers. These facts together with the serious cultural implications involved in knowing and comprehending

their apparent proveniences have been ignored (publicly) by archeologists, Iranian and international, and of course the media from the very beginning of modern archeological knowledge of the area.

The background to the recent developments and manifestation of the archeological and cultural term “Jiroft” has been recorded and discussed by Muscarella (2001 [2005]). Beginning in 2001 reports began to emanate from Iran via various Iranian Internet news and other Internet reports that major plundering activity was in progress in Jiroft, or that objects were being “unearthed in the old city of Jiroft . . . .” Soon thereafter countless Western Internet and other printed media outlets began to issue ongoing “reports,” some copying Iranian news sources, others making observations directly from the Jiroft region, and all exclusively employing the Jiroft city label to identify artifacts encountered (in reality or from photographs) as well as their alleged locus. This now entrenched de facto archeological use of a city named Jiroft as the sole locus (provenience), as if a single plundered site was under review, was continued thereafter, relentlessly by the media (e.g., Covington, 2004; Lawler, 2004) and regularly by archeologists, for example, “le site de Jiroft” (Madjidzadeh, 2003b, p. 19), “vases [et] . . . ‘monde’ de Jiroft,” “cimetiéres de Jiroft” (Perrot, 2003, pp. 97, 110; Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2004; idem, 2005). This contra-archeological solecism generated by scholarly usage continues, notwithstanding that within a couple of years it was determined by archeological surveys that the plundering indeed did not occur at or immediately adjacent to the city of Jiroft, but rather at some distance to its south, at about five or more ancient cemeteries. Perhaps to oppose the single usage “Jiroft” for the loci of the finds, some scholars refer to the area where they have surfaced as “the Jiroft” or “the Jiroft plain” (Lamberg-Karlovsky, 2004; Potts, 2005); the latter general term seems more viable.

Very few objectively determined facts about the “Jiroft culture” are known. One is that plundering did occur at cemeteries south of Jiroft, beginning at some time in 2001 and continuing for most of 2002. Another is that, beginning in 2002, confiscations by local authorities of plundered artifacts, primarily of chlorite, have been accomplished at various locations within Iran—Tehran, Jiroft, Bandar Abbas, etc., that is, in places up to 1,000 km apart; the objects are now deposited in Iranian institutions. But the exact, or approximate, number of confiscated objects remains unknown; undocumented sources (mostly but not solely reported in the media) claim hundreds, “100,000,” “tens of thousands,” “more than 2,000” or only 500 (Madjidzadeh, 2003b, p. 25; Perrot

and Madjidzadeh, 2003, p. 1087). But no authoritative record or reports on the number have yet appeared. Related to these issues is that shortly thereafter scores of similar chlorite objects began to surface in the possession of the plunderers' sponsors, the antiquity dealers, collectors, and museum curators, trustees, and directors.

In as much as it was determined not to conduct excavations or salvage surveys of the plundered cemeteries, the critical issue regarding the number of graves plundered at each cemetery remains unknown to date. Further, specific archeological information no longer possible to determine has been irrevocably destroyed in the hectic plundering: the number and forms of the artifacts recovered from each burial; the nature of the burials, single or multiple; how many actually contained chlorite artifacts, and in what quantities; gender and rank determinations for the burials that contained or did not contain chlorite artifacts; and whether all the plundered cemeteries uniformly contained chlorite artifacts. Internet and media reports have brought forth various figures for the number of objects plundered in "the" cemetery (or cemeteries), from a modest "thousands," to "100,000," to "hundreds of thousands." We will never know (but the upper figures seem too high).

Collectively, many of the published confiscated artifacts share the same cultural and stylistic features (for photographs of a collection of the confiscated objects in Iran, see Madjidzadeh, 2003a; Muscarella, 2001 [2005]; Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2005). They are thus generally identifiable, if not as "Jiroft" artifacts, as "style de Jiroft" (ibid., p. 135)—at least artifacts from Iran, most probably from the plundered cemeteries in the Kerman area, south of Jiroft. Other confiscated artifacts (both within Iran and surfacing abroad) have features characteristic of another style that is archeologically recorded in other areas of Iran, at Tepe Yahya, ca. 70-80 km west-southwest of Jiroft city (many maps give this site a wrong placement), and from sites in Mesopotamia, Syria, the Persian Gulf, and elsewhere. Archeologists know these as the "Intercultural Style." This dispersed corpus has been excavated in levels at sites attributed to the later phases of the Early Dynastic and to the following early Akkadian periods in Mesopotamian terminology. These cultures flourished in the second half of the third millennium B.C. and, based on disinterested archeological investigation, provide the chronological period in which the culture of the plundered "Jiroft" artifacts is to be realistically situated (Forest, 2003, pp. 131-32; Lamberg-Karlovsky, 2004, pp. 7-8; Amiet,

2002, pp. 95-96; Muscarella, 2001 [2005], pp. 178-79; Potts, 2005).

Not a minor event to be documented in the modern history of "Jiroft" is that, among both the artifacts confiscated within Iran itself and those surfacing and sold abroad, a number are most probably modern forgeries (Muscarella, 2001 [2005], pp. 181-89). In some cases this is recognized by other scholars of ancient Iranian cultures (e.g., Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2006, pp. 147, 149). Some other objects seem questionable and raise doubts in our minds about their actual birth dates (Muscarella, 2001 [2005], pp. 189-97). Moreover, "Jiroft" forgeries continue to surface among the more recent examples confiscated within Iran itself, and on the Internet, as well as in dealers' possession abroad.

A major component of most "Jiroft" discussions and cultural interpretations, both within the scholarly community and repeatedly echoed by the media and Internet, is the assertion that the "Jiroft" artifact record patently documents a major development in early ancient Near Eastern history, one hitherto archeologically unrevealed. The confiscated artifacts are asserted to reveal not only the existence of a newly recognized, dynamic culture, but, more momentous, the discovery of a hitherto unknown major "civilization." Because of a decreed early chronology for the chlorite artifacts dating them to the late fourth millennium and the first half of the third millennium B.C.E. (Perrot, 2003, pp. 97, 111; Madjidzadeh in Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2004, p. 1117), the "Jiroft" culture and its polity are proclaimed as historical reality to have preceded the emergence of Sumerian culture. Such a reversal of hitherto perceived interpretations about the nature of the initial diffusion of culture would indicate that the chlorite artifacts (also writing; see below) were exported from southern central Iran to Mesopotamia, and not in the other direction (Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2006, p. 148). Together with these chronological and cultural assertions, Madjidzadeh has broadened the cultural and geographical issues by claiming that the area of Jiroft is undoubtedly the land of Aratta—a rich cultural center mentioned by the Sumerians and existing to their east, somewhere in Iran—and that Jiroft/Aratta was manifestly the source for the genesis of Sumerian culture. These non-supportable, non-evidenced assertions are reported continuously, contrary to objective archeological and historical evidence that reference to Aratta occurs in the mid-third millennium B.C.E.

A number of scholars have indeed countered these unanchored pronouncements and firmly challenge them. They argue on the basis of objectively derived data surfacing from excavations that in reality the "Jiroft"

artifacts reflect a thriving culture of the 2nd half of the third millennium B.C.E., one that flourished centuries later than the genesis of Sumerian culture. Therefore the "Jiroft" culture was contemporary with a much later phase of Sumerian cultural history (Amiet, 2002; Muscarella, 2001 [2005], Lamberg-Karlovsky, 2004; Covington, 2004, p. 11). To date nothing has changed as regards securing firm, objectively derived information about the plundered cemeteries and the confiscations of objects within Iran, and Internet news and web reports (often repetitious) continue to serve as the main (unverifiable) source for information about "Jiroft."

However, a recent and important opportunity for obtaining objective archeological data of the cultures in the area ca. 28 km south of Jiroft is the excavation of two near-by tepes, named Konar Sandal North and South, or A and B (Covington, 2004, p. 7; Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2006, p. 125, fig. 2). Although the distance between the tepes is about 2 km (Covington, 2004, p. 7), they are sometimes referred to as if they constitute a single site (a repeat of the "Jiroft" syndrome). Directed by Y. Madjidzadeh, investigations began in 2003, and to date (2007) four campaigns have been completed. But other than a few quite brief, inadequate academic notes (Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2003, 2004), not one site report providing data on each tepe's architecture and plans, stratigraphical levels, sections, pottery, and so forth, has been published. Nor has the cultural and cultural relationship between the two tepes been discussed and evaluated. Internet reports, Iranian News and others, along with two media reports (Lawler, 2004; Covington, 2004), present short, unconnected sketches or isolated photographs of some of the material recovered, accompanied by the director's cultural conclusions, none of which can be investigated and substantiated by archeologists. In these Internet reports, the term Jiroft is always given as the tepes' cultural attribution, and as the cultural label for all artifacts and writing said to have been recovered there. Sometimes material recovered from the two tepes is conflated, preventing scholars from relating them to a specific tepe locus and to a specific cultural period or phase.

Concerning architecture, for Konar Sandal North scattered references report a terrace upon a broader brick foundation ("haute terrasse . . . 132 m. de côte reposant sur un soubassement en briques 280 m. de côte": Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2004, p. 1108). This is now identified (Covington, 2004, pp. 4, 7) as a ziggurat 400 x 400 meters, consisting of "four to five million bricks," and on the Internet is dated to 2300 B.C., "one to three centuries older than the

most ancient Mesopotamian Ziggurat" (Cultural Heritage News Agency).

For Konar Sandal South, a complex is mentioned ("qui paraît mesurer 300 x 400 meters de côte") set on a platform, also a house (Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2004, pp. 1114-17, fig. 11) and a fortress wall 10.5 meters thick (Madjidzadeh, 2003c, p. 72). From non-archeologist sources we are informed that a 14-room house was excavated (Lawler, 2004, p. 47) and that there is a two-storied citadel with windows (Covington, 2004, p. 7).

A small number of artifacts from these excavations have been reported, again mostly on the Internet, sometimes with the specific tepe source unmentioned. Fragments of chlorite artifacts are mentioned, all undecorated, as well as a chlorite plaque with an apparent spiral decoration in relief (Madjidzadeh, 2003c, p. 74, photo on p. 72; Perrot and Madjidzadeh, 2005, p. 149; ibid., 2006, p. 103, n. 26); seals and several hundred seal impressions (Covington, 2004, p. 2; Perrot, 2006, p. 108, n. 49); an unbaked mud relief of the lower part of a male, with his arms tied before his chest, from the South tepe ("unearthed in Jiroft"); and two soapstone reliefs depicting men with snake tails (25 x 17 cm); also shark bones and shells from the Persian Gulf (Covington, 2004, p. 10).

One of the most potentially significant finds reported on the Internet from Konar Sandal—but to the Internet from the "excavations in Jiroft," "the Jiroft ancient site—"are a number of alleged inscriptions. It remains unclear how many inscriptions exist, where they were excavated, or if any in fact were recovered from one or both of the tepes. The Internet mentions two inscriptions discovered at Konar Sandal in 2005, but no contexts are mentioned. In the same source, Madjidzadeh is quoted as stating that they should be labeled Proto-Iranian, not Proto-Elamite. Further, two other inscriptions are said to have been recovered in a local farmer's backyard, 300 meters from one of the tepes in 2006, that is, they were not excavated; they measure 18 x 10 cm and 13.5 x 8.5 cm. One Internet-published alleged inscription is on a broken object labeled a brick (20.3 cm) and preserving parts of one and a half lines of indentations. It is proclaimed to be 300 years older than writing from Susa, which signifies to the excavator that the Elamites learned about writing from "Jiroft." Another is a broken but complete tablet alleged to derive from Konar Sandal B (Basello, 2006; no documentation for the source or size is provided); it consists of five lines of incised geometric indentations. Another alleged inscription (still unpublished but circulating among scholars) consists of four lines of geometric incisions (that look as if freshly incised). Not one of the published (not by Madjidzadeh but on the

Internet) tablets and their indentations has any relationship with any known system of writing from any ancient culture (see Covington, 2004, p. 11).

Concomitant with the Konar Sandal tepe excavations, Madjidzadeh (2003b, p. 26) briefly mentioned excavations of several burials at two local cemeteries, Riganbar and Konar Sandal, but with no reference to their specific locations relative to the tepes or what was recovered. Only one has been published as a photograph (ibid., p. 25) that shows pottery vessels; it is a Bronze Age burial. An Internet report recorded that the bronze head of a goat "was found in the historical cemetery of Jiroft," a site that eludes us.

Such is the situation about the limited extent of archeological knowledge both of the plunder and the excavations at sites south of Jiroft up to 2007.

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