



## POŠT-E KUH

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**POŠT-E KUH**, the most western part of the historical Luristan (Lorestān) tribal area in the Zagros (map, [FIGURE 1](#)). Luristan is divided into two geographical areas by the Kabirkuh mountain ridge, the last major ridge before the Mesopotamian lowland when seen from the Iranian plateau. The western part was called Pošt-e Kuh, literally “behind the mountain,” while the larger northern and eastern part was called Piš-e Kuh or “before the mountain.”

In the modern administrative boundaries, Pošt-e Kuh is now part of Ilām Province (see [ILĀM](#)), and is situated between the Iranian provinces of Kermānšāh, Lorestān, and Khuzestan, and the Iran-Iraq border. It is divided into the districts of Ayvān, Širvān-Čardāvōl, Ilām, Darra Šahr, Mehrān, and Ābdānān. The district of [Dehlorān](#), which now also belongs to Ilām, was sometimes considered to be part of Pošt-e Kuh; but with archaeological sites such as Tepe Musiān, it is culturally more related to the Susiana. The Pošt-e Kuh landscape is dominated by small intra-mountainous plains or valleys. Larger plains extend towards the Khuzestan Province in the south and the Piš-e Kuh in the east.

The exploration of Pošt-e Kuh started relatively late in comparison with other regions of Persia and the Near East. Until about 1929, the quasi-autonomous governors (*wāli*) of Pošt-e Kuh ruled over this region. Major Henry C. Rawlinson was the first European to explore the region. Marching through Pošt-e Kuh with a regiment in 1836, he reported on the existence of Sasanian/Islamic ruins at Širvān and Darra Šahr (Rawlinson, pp. 49-60). They were first documented in more detail at the end of the 19th century by the



French Archaeological Mission, headed by Jacques de Morgan, traveling from Kermānšāh along Ilām and the Saymara River to Susa (de Morgan, 1896, pp. 3-6; idem, 1897, pp. 360-74; Jaunay, pp. 309-16, 444-47). A renewed interest in Luristan and Pošt-e Kuh came in the late 1920s when “Luristan bronzes” started to appear on the art market (see [LURISTAN BRONZES](#)). [Freya Stark](#) traveled through the Pošt-e Kuh (Stark, 1933; idem, 1934), while Aurel Stein (q.v.) only visited the Saymara valley around Darra Šahr (Stein, pp. 189-211).

A large-scale field project to solve the problems of the “Luristan bronzes,” focusing on Pošt-e Kuh, was started on the initiative of the late Louis Vanden Berghe (d. 1993; see [VANDEN BERGHE](#) at *Iranica.com*) in 1965 on behalf of Ghent University and the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels. During the next fifteen years, the Belgian Archaeological Mission in Iran (BAMI) surveyed and excavated about three months yearly in Pošt-e Kuh. The BAMI excavated graveyards but registered also settlement sites and monuments of more recent periods, such as rock sculptures, *čahārṭāqs*, and shrines (*emānzāda*; for a survey of the individual campaigns and reports, see Haerinck and Overlaet, 1996, pp. 1-6; for final reports, see Haerinck and Overlaet 1996, 1998, 1999, 2004a, 2006a; Overlaet, 2003). This research made it possible to establish the general prehistoric chronology of Pošt-e Kuh.

*Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods.* Limited evidence is available from Pošt-e Kuh. An early Neolithic site was discovered at Amirābād near Mehrān (Khaliliān) and Middle Chalcolithic graveyards were located along the Meyma River at Hakalān and at Dum Gār Parčina (Haerinck and Overlaet, 1996). Uruk period finds are not yet reported from Pošt-e Kuh. More than 200 individual stone-built Middle Chalcolithic tombs were excavated. No anthropological research on the human remains was made, but trepanation was noted. Pottery and stone vessels, button-seals, armament (mace heads, axes, hammer-axes), hand stones, and grinding slabs were prominent among the burial goods. Noteworthy are a cast copper mace head and pottery figurines of a standing woman and a bull. The painted pottery repertoire included goats and stylized goat heads, as well as vegetal and geometric motifs.

*The Bronze Age.* Graveyards with stone built cist tombs were discovered by the BAMI across the Pošt-e Kuh. Major cemeteries were excavated at [Ban-e Sorma](#), Kalla Nisār, and Mir Kayr. The Early Bronze Age, covering the late 4th and 3rd millennium BCE is best documented. It is divided into the Early, Middle, and Late phases, based on changes in both tomb structures and burial



goods. The Middle and Late Bronze Ages are poorly documented. The Middle Bronze Age is known through sporadic re-use of Early Bronze Age tombs. The Late Bronze Age (mid-2nd millennium BCE) is only documented by one tomb at Sarāb Bāg, containing some painted pottery and bronze pins.

The early phase of the Early Bronze Age (late 4th/early 3rd millennium BCE) corresponds with the Jemdet Naṣr and beginning of Early Dynastic I in Mesopotamia. It is documented by small, mainly individual tombs at Mir Kāyr, and Kalla Nisār AI. The burial goods include cooking, fine common, monochrome, and polychrome painted wares. Other finds included beads, shells, microliths, and simple copper-based items (awls, flat axes, coiled bracelets and finger rings, and tanged knives).

The Middle phase of the Early Bronze Age covers a large part of the 3rd. millennium and corresponds to the remainder of the Early Dynastic and the Akkadian periods in Mesopotamia. Most burial goods (bronzes, beads, shells, etc.) are nearly identical throughout the Pošt-e Kuh, but the painted pottery provides a more complicated picture with three different regions.

The Mesopotamia related zone I with sites such as Ban-e Sorma and Kalla Nisār, is characterized by corridor shaped tombs of up to 16 meters in length. They are well built with large boulders and covered by a flat stone roof. These tombs were constructed during the Early Dynastic I/II and remained in use during the ED III and Akkadian period. Some have even been re-used until the Old Babylonian period. Besides Mesopotamian cylinder seals and other objects, the pottery equally displays a strong Mesopotamian influence. There are imports as well as imitations of Mesopotamian types among the plain pottery and the polychrome scarlet ware. Identical pottery with animals painted on the lower part, known from the nearby ḤOamrin and Diāla in Mesopotamia, was the inspiration for the local polychrome vessels.

The Dehlorān related zone II covers the southern Pošt-e Kuh. Long corridor shaped tombs with flat roofs of 6 to 10 meters in length were found at Pošt-e Qal'a-ye Ābdānān, Qabr-e Nahi, Taḳ-t-e Kān, Tawarsa, etc. The painted pottery includes monochrome and polychrome wares. The monochrome ware has simple geometric decorations and has affinities to the Piš-e Kuh and Susiana. The polychrome pottery has metopes on the shoulder with trees or goats with stylized bodies and birds on their back. Identical pottery was found in the Dehlorān as well as at Mirwali in Rumešgān.



The Piš-e Kuh related zone III is known from tombs at [Dar-e Tanhā](#) and Ban Chaliah. These 6 to 8 m long constructions have a gabled roof which relates them to tombs in the Pish-e Kuh. The presence of monochrome painted jars confirms this link with the traditions in central Pish-e Kuh. The occasional presence of polychrome vessels links this region also to zone I.

The Late Phase of the Early Bronze Age corresponds to the late Akkadian, Guti, Ur III and Isin/Larsa periods in Mesopotamia. It is documented by tombs at sites such as Kalla Nisār AII, Darvand A, Gululal-i Galbi, and Sardant. Characteristic is the return to small individual tombs of 1.20 to 1.70m. in length with only three stone sidewalls. The burial goods reflect contacts with both the Piš-e Kuh and Mesopotamia. There are monochrome painted jars that are inspired by Piš-e Kuh types but which have a simpler decoration of triangles and groups of vertical lines. Some plain vessels are, however, clearly of Mesopotamian origin. Metal finds were rare and typical are the shaft hole axes of folded sheet metal. Noteworthy finds are an etched carnelian bead and “Gutian”-style cylinder-seals.

*The Iron Age.* As the BAMi research was focused on the Iron Age, the period of the canonical Luristan bronzes, this period is well documented. It is divided into an Early and a Late Iron Age. Canonical Luristan bronzes are characteristic for the Early Iron Age, which is subdivided into periods IA, IB-IIA, and IIB. They were apparently no longer produced during the Late Iron Age or Iron Age III.

The Early Iron Age, the Iron Age IA, is dated from 1300/1250 to 1150 BCE. The earliest tombs, all individuals, were discovered at Duruyeh. Among the burial goods were bronze toggle pins and buff ware pitchers with a pinched spout, items that still stand in the Late Bronze Age tradition, and pottery beakers that are related to Mesopotamian Late Kassite pottery. A gradual replacement of the pitchers by teapots, the distinctive shape throughout the Iron Age in the Pošt-e Kuh, could be noticed at Duruyeh. The graveyard at Kotal-e Golgol is of slightly later date. They were built somewhat larger, probably with the intend to be re-used. All these tombs contained a mass of burial goods. During each burial, room was made by piling them up against the walls of the tomb. These burial goods included faience vessels and shell finger rings of Kassite manufacture. Their import may have ended when Elamite forces destroyed the Kassite townships in the Mesopotamian Diāla. The widespread re-use of the tombs makes it often difficult to date specific objects precisely. Nevertheless, the presence of the Luristan decorative style during the IA phase



was proven by the discovery of spiked butted axe heads and a swimming duck headed pin. Other canonical bronzes, such as spiked butted axes with animal decorations, whetstone handles with naturalistic animal decorations, bracelets with terminals in the shape of a “swimming duck,” and idols in the shape of naturalistically rendered rampant animals, may already have existed in the Iron Age IA phase but could have also originated in the Iron Age IB-IIA phase. Iron may already have been used in this phase, but only for small jewelry items. It was certainly used for pins and finger rings in the following Iron Age IB-IIA phase (ca. 1150 – ca. 900 BCE). Armament continued to be made of bronze and the Luristan decorative bronze style continued to flourish. This phase is otherwise badly documented, however, only a few tombs can be dated with some certainty to this phase. Tombs simply continued to be re-used at sites such as Kotal-e Golgol and Bard-e Bal and only a few newly constructed tombs can be securely dated in this phase. The last phase of the Early Iron Age, the *Iron Age IIB* (ca. 900-800/750 BCE) is known from Tepe Kalwali, Pošt-e Kabud and DarvandB These graveyards consist of small individual tombs. Iron started to be used for armament (daggers) in this phase, but dispensable items such as arrowheads were still made of bronze.

The Late Iron Age. The Iron Age III (ca. 800/750 – ca. 650 BCE) is the best-documented period in the Pošt-e Kuh. A large number of Iron Age III cemeteries with individual stone built cist tombs are documented (see [JUB-e GOWHAR](#), [GOL KĀNĀN MORDA](#), and [WAR KABUD](#)). This suggests a noticeable increase in population may have occurred. The burial goods reflect contacts with the surrounding cultures. Assyrian annals mention also military conflicts with Luristan populations. A Neo-Assyrian rock-sculpture at Šekaft-e Golgol is proof of an Assyrian incursion into the Pošt-e Kuh.

The presence of new wares and pottery shapes in the Iron Age III tombs sets them clearly apart from those of the preceding periods. There is a characteristic fine grey ware with incised decorations that can be related to the Bābā Jān III painted pottery (see [BĀBĀ JĀN TEPE](#)). Iron is commonly used for weapons and tools while bronze is preferred for jewelry (e.g., bracelets, rings). Occasionally, small amounts of silver and gold were used for earrings or nose-rings. Bronze vessels, exceptional in the Iron Age I-II, became a common burial good in the Iron Age III. Canonical Luristan bronzes are exceptional and were apparently no longer produced. At Tattolbān, an idol and support was found in a tomb which must, however, be dated to the very beginning of the Iron Age III. Simple iron shaft-hole axes occurred at several



sites and seem to have replaced the bronze spike-butted axes. In three cemeteries still occurred a bronze axe-adze, two of which were decorated with simple bearded human faces. They have little in common with the canonical Luristan imagery and may represent the last phase of this bronze casting tradition or they may simply be heirlooms.

*The pre-Islamic historical periods.* Although a systematic research on the period is still lacking, it seems that the region was densely occupied and prosperous, at least during the Sasanian era. Early explorers already reported about the size and quality of ruins at sites such as Darra Šahr and Širvān (modern Sar Kalan), currently under investigation by Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (Sāzmān-e mirāṭ-e farhangī wa gardešgari). The BAMİ located several (presumably) Sasanian sites during a survey of the Širvān-Čardāvōl districts (Vanden Berghe and Tourovets, 1992, pp. 12-22, fig. 3-6, pl. 6-8B; De Meyer, pp. 53-54, 62-65). A series of *čahārṭāqs* along the main routes through Pošt-e Kuh are known (Vanden Berghe, 1977), some of which were later transformed into an *emāmzāda* (Haerinck and Overlaet, 2006b, pl. 11, 20).

An early Sasanian re-use of a Bronze Age tomb was discovered at Mehr War Kabud. The tomb contained pottery, jewelry and also a bronze container with inscribed silver and gold sheets that has not yet been deciphered (Vanden Berghe, 1972, pp. 4-48, fig. 1-13, pl. I-V).

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