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# AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL LOOK INTO SIMPLE PIT BURIALS AT TEPE QARA HASANLU, NAMIN, ARDABIL

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## ABSTRACT

Excavations at the historical mound of Qara Hasanlu, in the Namin County of Ardabil Province of northwestern Iran, brought to light several pit graves set on a massive mudbrick artificial platform. Cut into the uppermost courses of the mud bricks forming this platform, the graves were associated with scores of burial gifts of varied types such as arrowheads, daggers, scissors, mirrors, earrings, and necklaces. As a descriptive-analytical work drawing upon both field and library research, the present paper is set to characterize the recorded grave types and their relative chronology in quest of tenable answer to these questions:

1. What were the grave types and mortuary customs at Qara Hasanlu?
2. Where do they find parallels, and to which period do they belong to?

Within the graves, the bodies were laid out in two supine and squatting positions. Based on the available circumstantial evidence, they were made sometime after the platform was constructed. The documented cultural material including sherd assemblages, the burial methods and the burial gifts suggested a date in the Parthian period for the site.

## REZUMAT: STUDIU ARHEOLOGIC ASUPRA MORMINTELOR DIN TEPE QARA HASANLU, NAMIN, ARDABIL

Săpăturile de la tumulul istoric Qara Hasanlu, în regiunea Namin din provincia Ardabil din nord-vestul Iranului, au scos la lumină mai multe morminte amplasate pe o platformă artificială masivă de cărămidă. Săpate în rândurile superioare ale cărămizilor de chirpici care formează această platformă, mormintele au fost dotate cu zeci de cadouri funerare de diferite tipuri, cum ar fi vârfuri de săgeți, pumnale, foarfece, oglinzi, cercei și coliere. Fiind o lucrare descriptiv-analitică bazată atât pe cercetarea de teren, cât și pe cea bibliotecă, articolul de față își propune să caracterizeze tipurile de morminte înregistrate și cronologia lor relativă în căutarea unui răspuns sustenabil la aceste întrebări:

1. Care au fost tipurile de morminte și obiceiurile mortuare la Qara Hasanlu?
2. Unde se găsesc analogii și cărei perioade aparțin?

În morminte, defuncții erau așezați în două poziții în decubit dorsal și ghemuit. Pe baza dovezilor circumstanțiale disponibile, acestea au fost făcute cândva după ce platforma a fost construită. În urma documentării materialului arheologic, inclusiv ceramica, ritul funerar și ofrandele de înmormântare au sugerat o datare în epoca partică pentru întregul sit.

**KEYWORDS:** Tepe Qara Hasanlu, Namin, mudbrick platform, burial, Parthian period.

**CUVINTE CHEIE:** Tepe Qara Hasanlu, Namin, platformă de cărămidă de chirpici, înmormântare, epoca partică.

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## Introduction

An initial surface survey and subsequent systematic excavations at Tepe Qara Hasanlu in the county of Namin, under the direction of the first author of this study produced a wealth of cultural material and significant evidence, crucial to the detailed study of the site. The original excavation was completed between 26<sup>th</sup> of January and 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 and will be extended for a further month in the following spring. A huge part of the site was cleared through excavating a total of 13 trenches all over the mound. The extensive and systematic excavations yielded information about different parts of the site. A colossal mudbrick platform of particular interest was recovered in

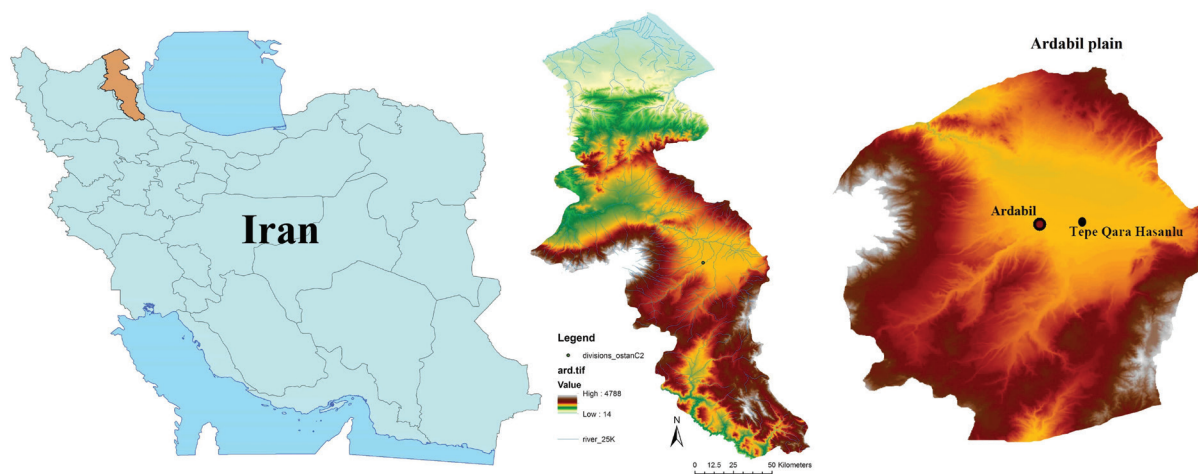


Fig. 1: Map of Ardabil Province showing the location of Tepe Qara Hasanlu in the Ardabil plain (by authors).

the center of the mound. Further evidence bolstering the site's importance consisted of a series of graves that were cut into the surface of the platform. Large numbers of objects made of ceramic, bone, and metal (including gold) as well as beads were recovered from these graves. The graves varied in shape and burial methods. Presently, little is known about the huge platform and the burials it contained. Thus, besides a structural analysis of the terrace and presenting the identified burial customs, the present paper will propose a relative date for the site and the associated material culture.

## History of Regional Research

There are some remarkable studies concerning the archaeological survey and reconnaissance of prehistoric sites of the Ardabil plain, most of which concern forts and cemeteries. J. de Morgan was the first scholar to visit the region. Between 1899–1901, he surveyed a number of cemeteries with stone-lined graves and proposed a Late Bronze Age date for Gavour Qalasi<sup>1</sup>. Schaeffer embarked on surveys and explorations around the Ardabil plain and, based on his excavations at the cemeteries of Hasan Zamini and Aq Evlar, dated the sites to the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>2</sup> These pioneering efforts were to be resumed by German expeditions through a couple of trips that resulted in several seasons of investigations in 1967, 1968, 1971, 1977 and 1978 across the present-day provinces of East Azerbaijan and Ardabil (in such plains as Jolfa, Marand, Tabriz, Maragheh, Miyaneh, Sarab, Ardabil, Germe, Ahar, and Meshginshahr).<sup>3</sup> Charles Burney surveyed the historical sites of the Meshginshahr region, where he identified 76 sites.<sup>4</sup> Other notable efforts include surveys of the Germe region<sup>5</sup>, the 2000 fieldwork and 2004 excavation at Tepe Idir in Moghan<sup>6</sup>, recurrent systematic excavations at the legendary site of Shahar Yeri as well as at Qosha Tepe<sup>7</sup>, systematic work in the plains of Ardabil, Meshginshahr region and Khalkhal<sup>8</sup>, surveys of the Russian expedition covering a region extending from Aslanduz to Khalkhal in 2008, K. Alizadeh's excavations at Oltan in Moghan (later resumed by Mohajerinejad) and at Tepe Naderi, excavation of Qala Boini and Qala Yelsue by F. Tahmasebi, and Hajizadeh's excavation and survey of Qizil Qaya and the Ahl Iman Dam in Meshginshahr region. As it is clear from this short inventory, no archaeological work of any sort has ever covered Tepe Qara Hasanlu. It is also noteworthy that the cited studies, for the most part, focused on cemeteries, thus a precise understanding of settlement sites in the Ardabil plain is still pending. A main reason for this deficiency is the presence across the Ardabil plain of excessively thick sediments, which have obscured most of historical and prehistoric sites. Accordingly, a shift in scholarly focus on settlement sites seems critically essential.

<sup>1</sup> de Morgan 1905, 267–305.

<sup>2</sup> Schaeffer 1948, 408.

<sup>3</sup> See Kroll 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Ingraham and Summer 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Hessari and Aliyari 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Hessari and Akbari 2005; Hessari and Akbari 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Hejebri Nobari 2003; Hejebri Nobari and Pourfaraj 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Rezalou 2006; Rezalou 2008; Rezalou 2009; Rezalou 2010; Rezalou 2012.



## Tepe Qara Hasanlu

Qara Hasanlu is a mound in the Namin County of Ardabil Province. Separated by 1 km from the Ardabil-Ab Beiglu road, it lies in a wide, open plain at the center of the broader Ardabil plain, 2 km northwest of the village of Qara Hasanlu and 9 km east of the city of Ardabil (Fig. 1). The site is located at N 38°15.6286', E 48°25.7033', at an altitude of 1330 m. As the mound lay within the prospective construction site of a steel mill, a salvage excavation started there in late January 2022 to gain an understanding of the site and examine its cultural sequence. With a total area of 3700 sq. m, the mound raises a maximum of about 1 m above the surrounding plain. Topographically, it has a semi-circular profile. The central mound represents the highest point, and the mound gently slopes from north to south. The site originated from both artificial deposits incurred by human occupations and natural features formed by the Ardabil plain's sediments (Fig. 2–4).



Fig. 2. Location of Tepe Qara Hasanlu in the Ardabil plain and its distance from the city of Ardabil (Google Earth).

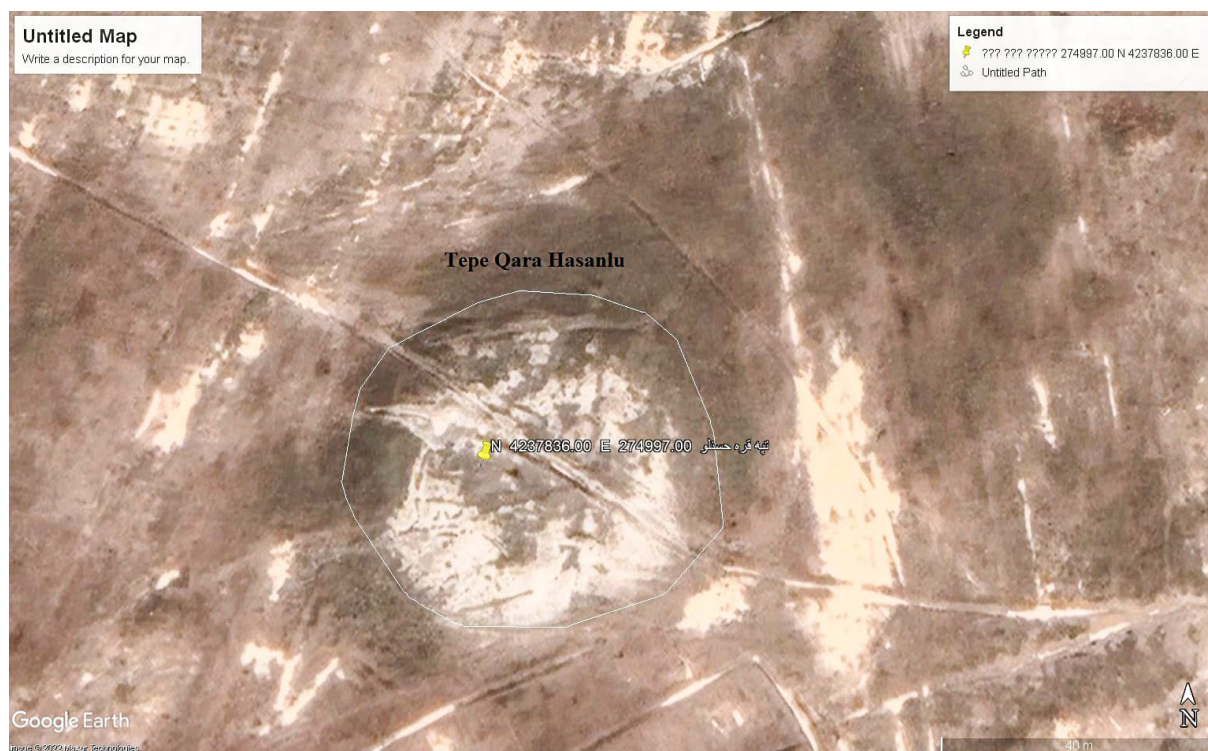


Fig. 3. Aerial photo of Tepe Qara Hasanlu (Google Earth).





*Fig. 4. The relatively low mound of Qara Hasanlu in the middle of the Ardabil plain (by authors).*

### Mudbrick Platform

The main find of interest at Tepe Qara Hasanlu was a massive mudbrick platform. It represents the only known instance of such artificial structure in all the geographic extent of northwest Iran. Detected in the surface survey and in most of the trenches, the structure was partially exposed by removing the overlying sedimentary deposits. It is almost square, and the main constituent parts are the stone footings, the mudbrick body, and the buttresses. The exterior faces exhibit buttresses all around, at irregular intervals, and a mudbrick superstructure built in seven courses resting on footings made of three courses of cobbles and large stone blocks. The core is nevertheless completely formed from uninterrupted courses of mudbricks. Siting at the center of the site, the platform encompasses large parts of the mound, and given the total absence of other architectural remains of any type in the trenches, the mound seemingly served a function other than a permanent settlement when the platform was in use.

### Burials

On the platform described above there were recovered four pit graves that contained bodies laid out in squatting or supine positions. The graves were cut into the upper courses of the mudbricks as simple oval pits. Of the four identified examples, three lay on the platform proper and the remaining one was associated with an extension to the latter. They showed varying limits on the mound's surface, and their real extent immediately became evident once the surface sediments were removed. The burials were undoubtedly made after the construction of the platform (Fig. 5–6).



*Fig. 5. Tepe Qara Hasanlu: The recovered mudbrick platform (photo by authors).*



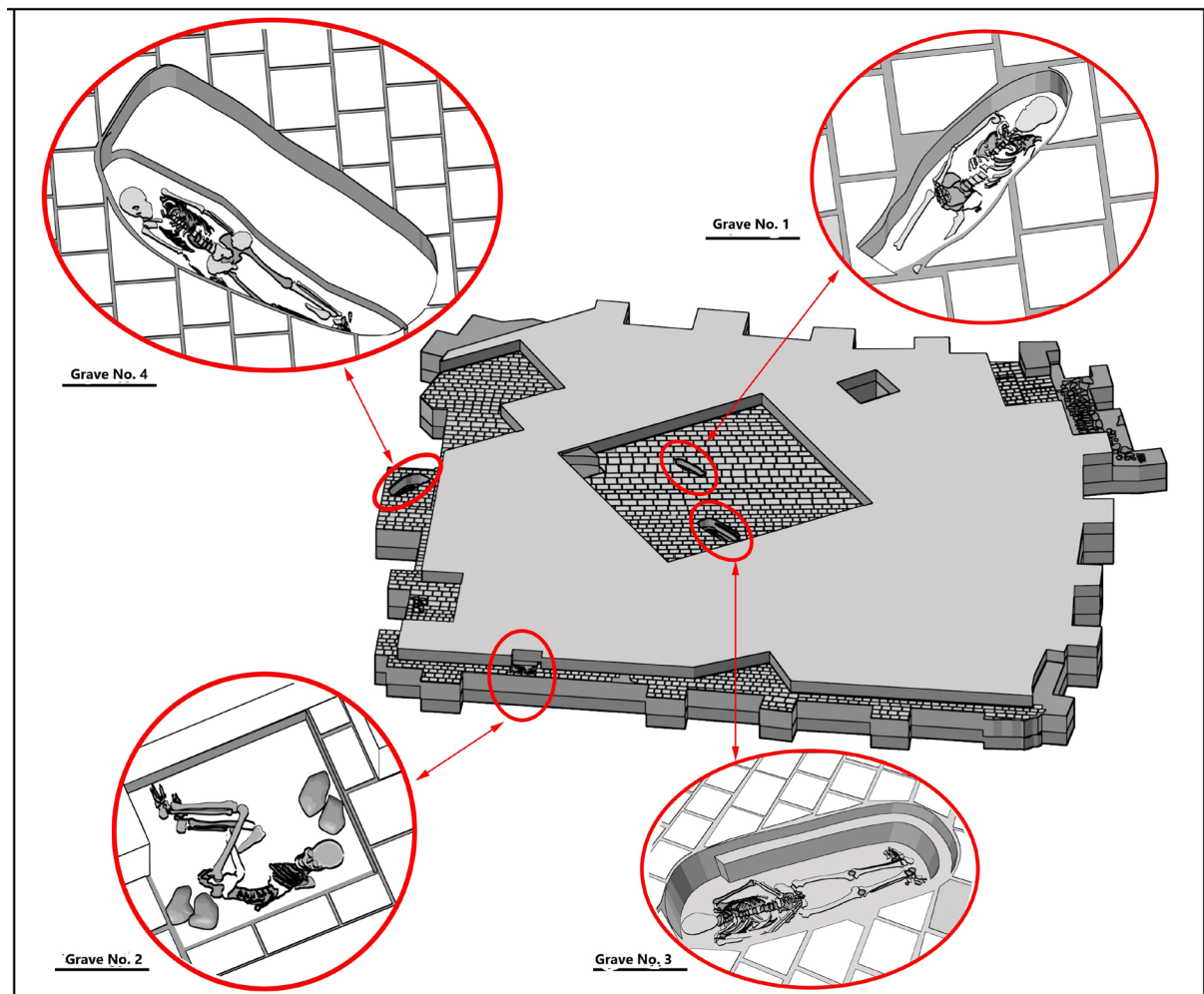


Fig. 6. Tepe Qara Hasanlu: Schematic reconstruction of the platform, and the positions of the recovered burials (drawing by authors).

### Burial 1

The first identified grave, Burial 1, was found in Trench VI. Representing a simple inhumation or pit grave, it was made within the upper courses of the mudbricks through cutting an oval pit. The pit's width strictly followed



Fig. 7. Burial 1, Trench VI.

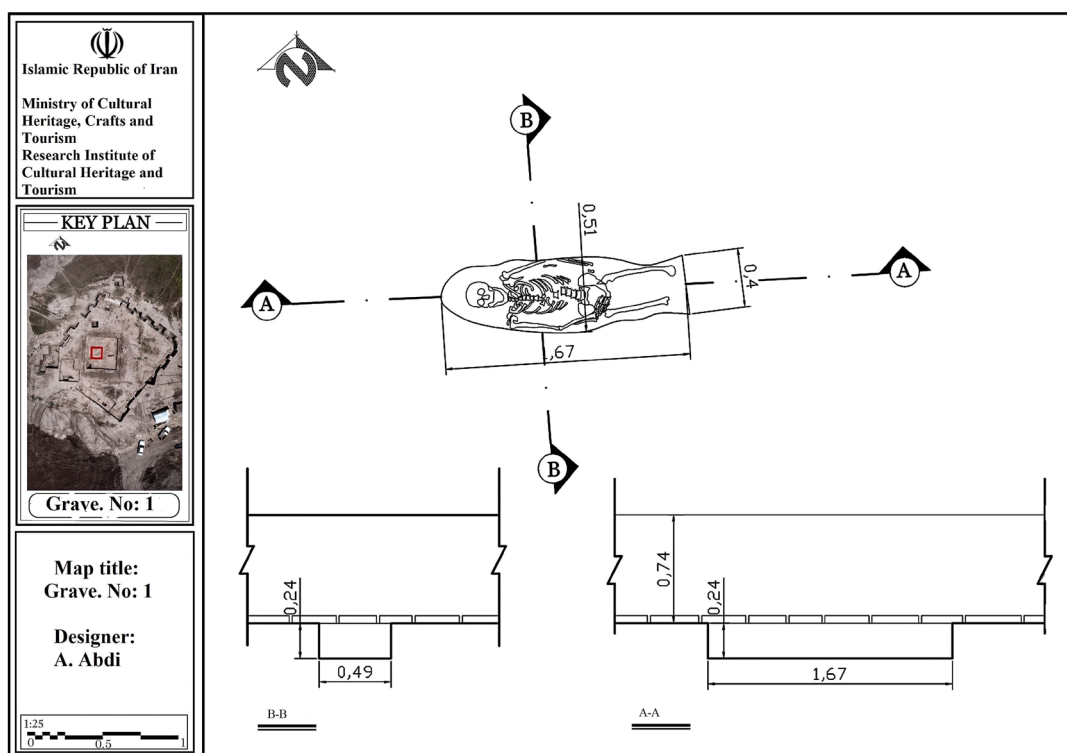


Fig. 8. Qara Hasanlu: Drawing of Burial 1, and its position in the site.



Fig. 9. Qara Hasanlu: Arrowheads from Burial 1.



that of the deposited body, with the clavicles, humeri and femurs touching the side walls. The fill within the pit consisted of a layer of soil mixed with fine sand used to cover both the grave and the skeleton. Following the pit's orientation, the body lay in a west-east direction. The pit measured 1.78 m long and a maximum width of 0.54 m. The body's stature was 1.3 m from the cranium to the patella. The lower limb was partially disturbed by clandestine excavations in this part of the trench, and the patella and phalanges were thus missing. The upper limb measured 60 cm long from the clavicle to the metacarpus, and the femurs were 40 cm long. The right humerus rested at a ca. 160-degree angle against the west wall of the grave, hence the forearm bones extended towards the pelvis. The same was true of the left arm. The burial probably belonged to a middle-aged male, buried in supine position. The teeth were almost intact. Burial gifts were placed about 120 cm from the skull (Fig. 7–9).

#### *Burial Gifts*

A total of four objects, all iron arrowheads, were recovered from Burial 1 of Trench VI (Tr. VI, B. 1) between the femurs. Lying 8 cm below the highest point of the grave, the objects measure about 11, 13.5, 13.3 and 9.3 cm long, respectively.

#### *Burial 2*

The burial was discovered in Trench V, again within the upper platform, and was overlain by a single course of mudbricks. The rectangular burial pit measured 1.18 m north-south and 0.96 m east-west and was 0.4 m deep. The “walls” showed smooth and regular surfaces, forming a regular pit. The floor was fairly flat. Typically lacking any sort of architectural structure, it was filled with relatively soft soil. The skeletal remains laid 18 cm below the datum of the grave. This individual burial belonged to a young female as is suggested by its skull and pelvis. Laying on the right side in a squatting or fetal position, the body was oriented northeast-southwest, with the head to the north, facing east. The maximum length of the skeleton from the skull's top to the base of the right phalange was about 1.1 m, and the maximum width was formed by the left tibia and the right radius at 0.61 m. The skull was in a relatively good state of preservation, showing only a crack in the temporal area. The teeth were completely in place and the mandible rested on the maxilla. The teeth were well-persevered, lacking any indications of erosion. Only slight surface wear occurred, an observation bearing testimony to the mastication of hard food (Fig. 10–12).

#### *Burial Gifts*

The grave only contained an iron dagger 27.8 cm long, 3.3 cm wide, and about 7 mm thick.



Fig. 10. Burial 2, Trench V.

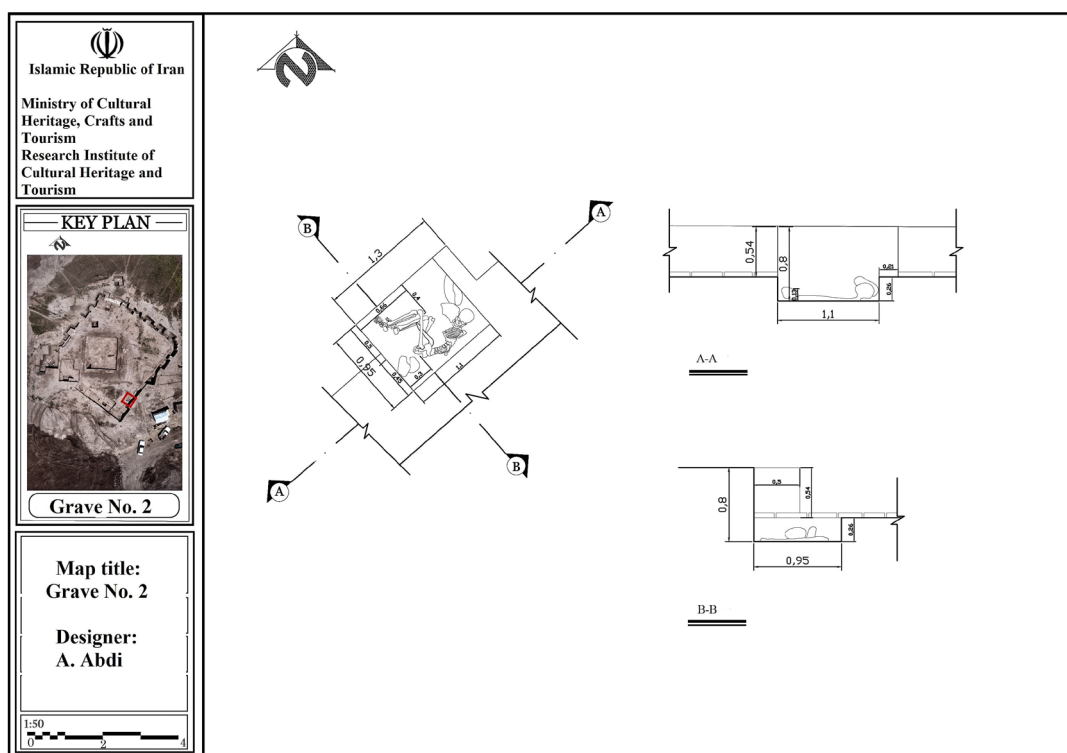


Fig. 11. *Qara Hasanlu: Burial 2, Trench V.*



Fig. 12. *Qara Hasanlu: Drawing of Burial 2, and its position in the site.*

### Burial 3

It was identified in Trench X. The oval burial pit was oriented northwest-southeast. The highest level of the pit, i.e., its northern corner, laid 40 cm below the datum. The pit was readily discernible within the mudbrick bed once the topsoil was removed. The pit likewise lacked in any structure and was formed simply by cutting the mudbricks. At the end of the funeral, it was filled with soft soil. The pit contained a human burial, burial gifts, and the soft soil used to cover the skeleton. The body was placed on its back, with the head to the north, almost facing east. The total length of the skeleton from the skull to the phalanges was 1.6 m and its maximum width was 0.4 m. The skull was relatively well-preserved and exhibited only two small occipital pits or dimples. Judging by the partial closure of the cranial sutures, the body perhaps belonged to a young female. The mandible was in place.



Teeth were quite healthy, though a premolar and an incisor were missing. The maxilla was likewise intact, with all the teeth present on the dental arch. The only observed dental damage was the partial wear, seemingly related to masticatory activities. At any rate, the teeth, and the cranium in general exhibited a good state of preservation. The arms extended along the body. The accompanying funeral gifts speak of her high social status. An interesting point was that within the grave next to the skull there was a small platform on which animal bones were placed probably as food offerings (Fig. 13–18).



Fig. 13. Burial 3, Trench X.

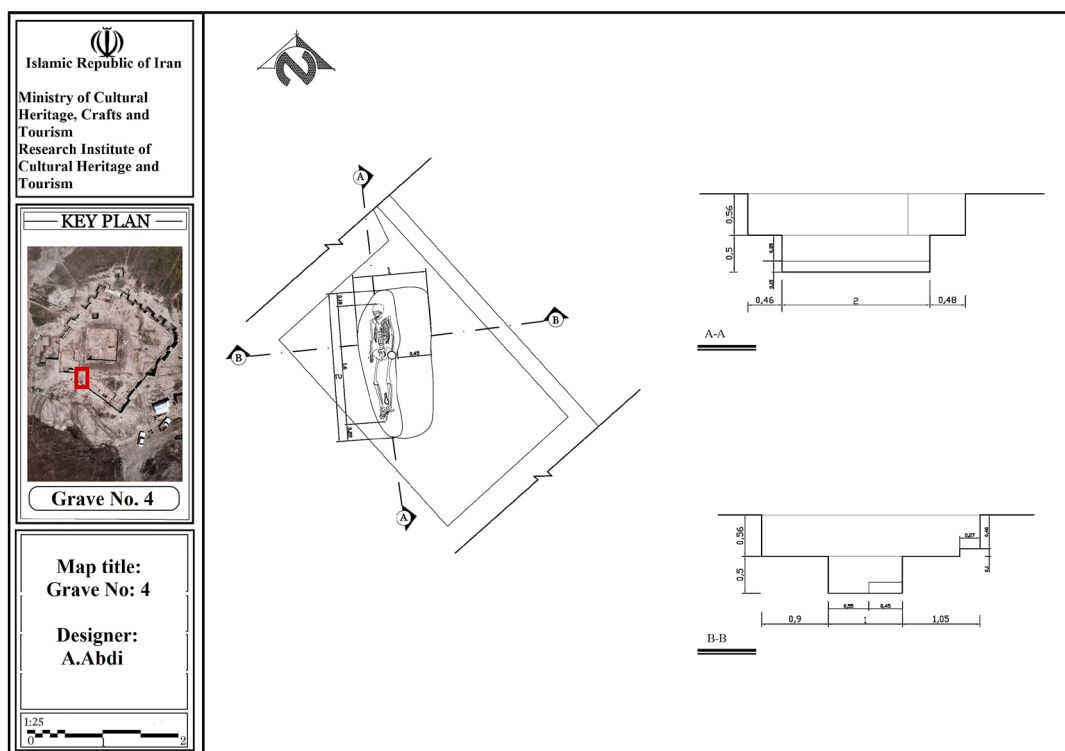


Fig. 14. Drawing of Burial 3 and its position in the site.

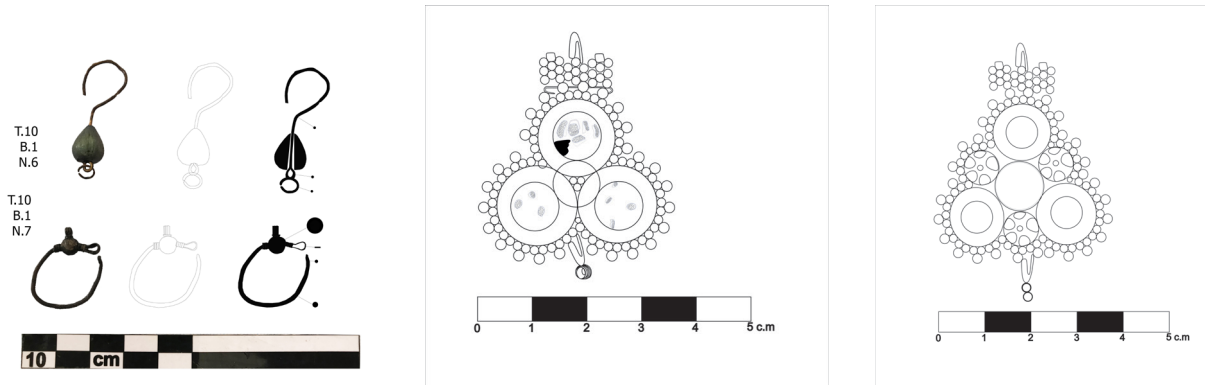


Fig. 15. Drawings of the gold and silver earrings from Burial 3.

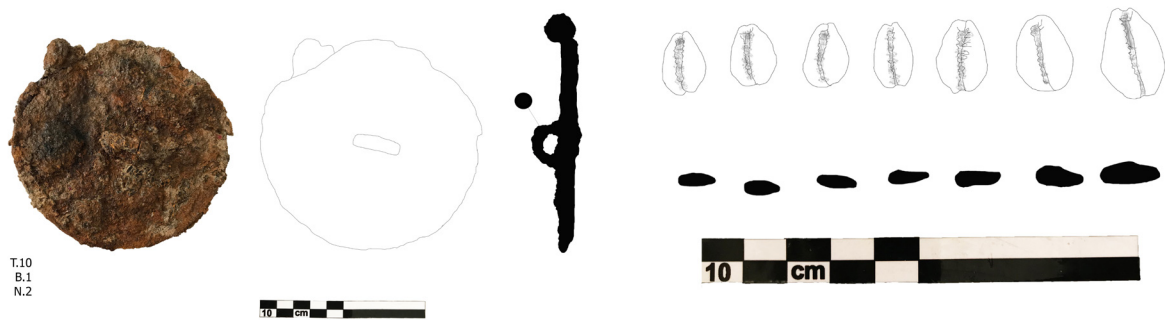


Fig. 16. The shell beads and metal mirror from Burial 3.

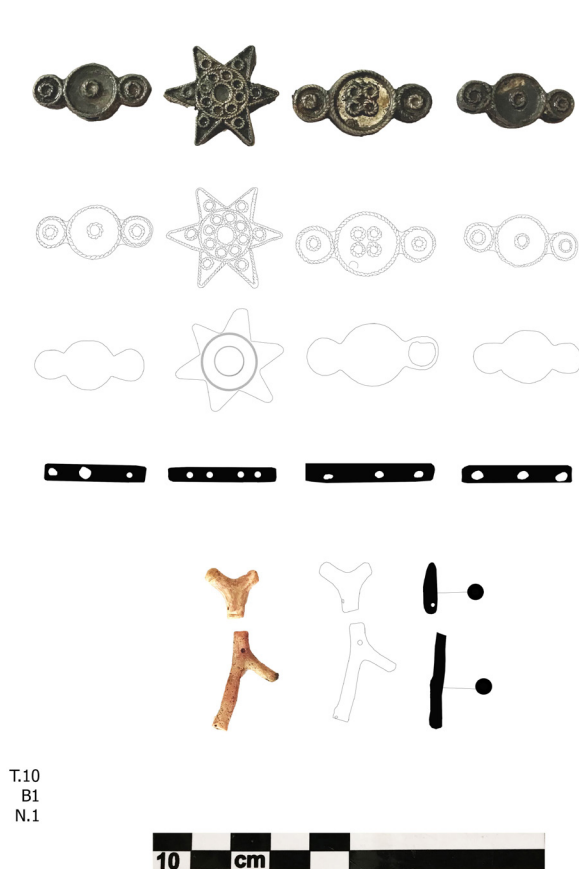


Fig. 17. The silver necklace from Burial 3.

#### Burial gifts

Burial 3 yielded a profusion of metal objects. It contained a young female's body deposited together with her belongings. Associated objects included a pair of gold earrings, two disparate silver earrings, and a silver necklace in four parts with two bifurcate bone pieces. The necklace was found near the cranium around the neck. Her left hand held an iron mirror, whose surface retains traces of textile. The total diameter of the mirror is 13 cm. Between the legs there was found a pair of iron scissors, which was seemingly wrapped in a piece of cloth at the time of deposition. During its excavation, evidence of textile was detected. The piece closely parallels modern-day scissors. Under the scissors, 7 shell beads belonging to an anklet were recovered.



Fig. 18. The Iron scissors from Burial 3.





Fig. 19. Burial 4, Trench XI.

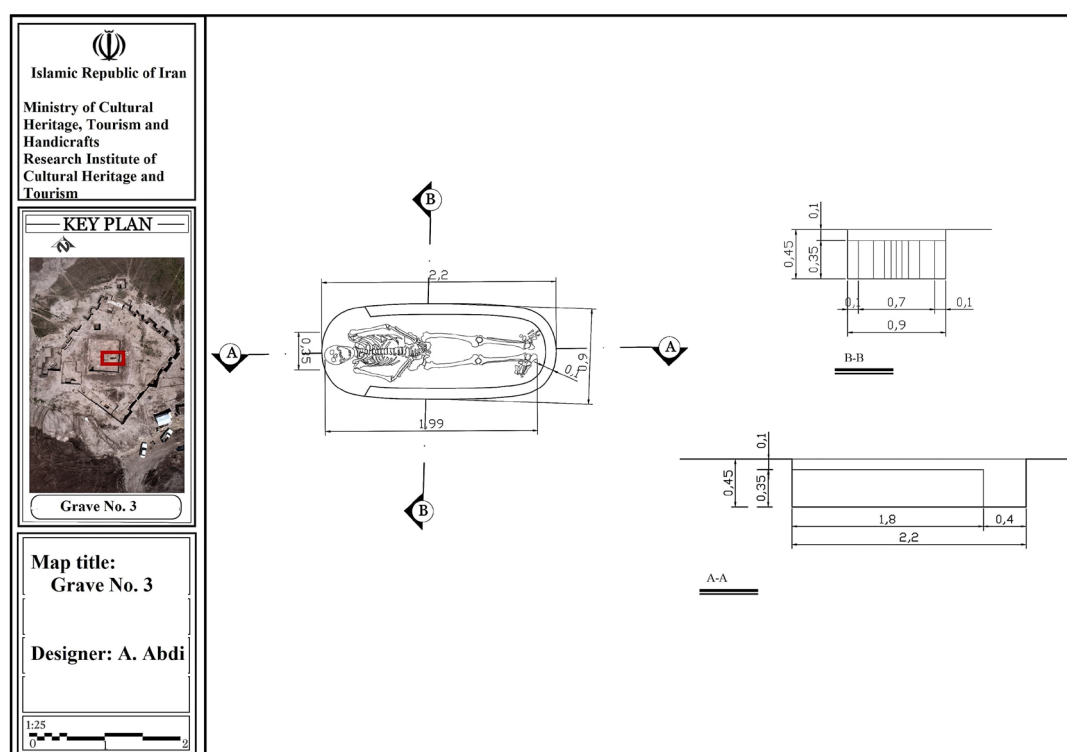


Fig. 20. Drawing of Burial 4, and its position in the site.

#### Burial 4

This simple inhumation grave discovered in the area of Trench XI contained a body positioned on its back. The skull was to the northeast, facing upward, with the mouth completely open. The body was laid out following the almost northwest-northeast orientation of the pit. From the shape of the pit, it can be described as an almost oval grave, again made into the mudbricks of the platform. During the excavation we noticed decayed wood fragments, which were probably used together with a layer of clay to cover the grave. The fill within the burial pit consisted of soil mixed with fine to medium sand that blanketed both the grave and the skeleton. The maxilla was absent, as was the nasal bone. The only seven present mandibular teeth show evidence of wear but lack any indications of carious lesions. The burial probably belonged to a middle-aged male (35 to 45).

#### Burial gifts

Inside Burial 4 there were found iron arrowheads and iron studs next to the right forearm and the right leg, a coin within the mouth, and single scale 5 cm from the chest. The coin measures about 9 mm in diameter and 1 mm in thickness. Further description of this silver coin is hindered by the crusty limescale deposit. A piece akin to a nail or rod was associated with 7 arrowheads that measure 14 cm, 21 cm, 6.5 cm, 3.5 cm, 11 cm, 13.5 cm, and 9.3 cm long, respectively, all having a thickness of about 3 mm. The metal rod/nail has a maximum length of 4.8 cm and a thickness of 4 mm (Fig. 19–22).

#### Discussion

Apart from the pottery assemblage and the mudbrick platform, what appears to be of substantial help in ascertaining the exact date of Qara Hasanlu is the group of recovered burials. The Parthian coin placed within the mouth of the body in one of the graves makes the attribution of the site to the Parthian era, at least during certain periods of its occupations, certain and absolute. To make those simple pit burials, a quasi-oval pit was cut into the upper courses of the mudbrick platform to make way for the body, before the latter was deposited and covered in a layer of soft soil. Hence, the burials certainly postdated the platform. Four burials were identified in total, of which three lay



Fig. 21. The arrowheads from Burial 4.

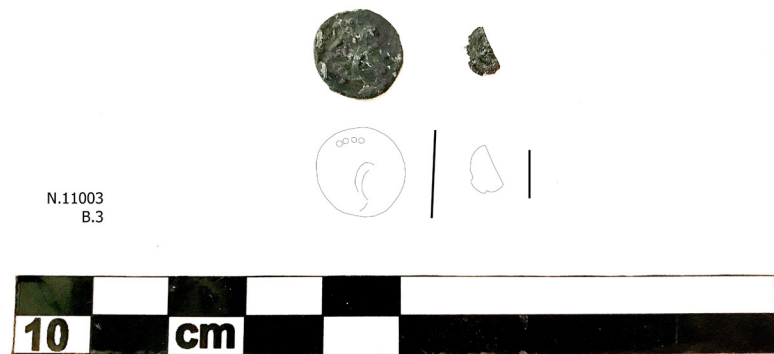


Fig. 22. The coin found within the mouth of the dead in Burial 4.



Table 1. Burnished painted pottery with cross-hatchings from Qara Hasanlu (by authors).




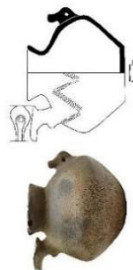



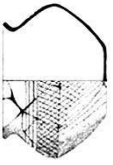







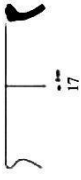





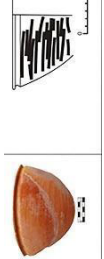

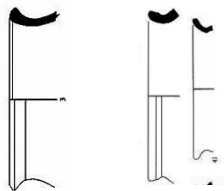



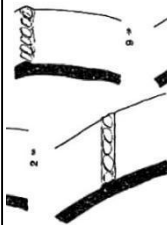

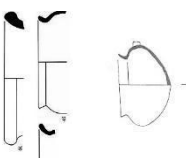


No.	Site	Period	Illustration	Comp. provenance	Comp. illustration	Comp. reference
1	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Jafarabad (Khodaafarin)		Haerinck 1988, 67–68, pls. 58–59; Naghshineh 2010, 83; Iravani Ghadim et al. 2012, 47
2	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Sarand-Dlghdighan, Goey Tepe A, Khurnin, Haftaban V, Kurdlar, Masjed-e Kabud, Marlík, Ghey-tariyeh, Bayazidabad, Naghadeh, Nakhichevan		Burton-Brown 1951, fig. 36; Young 1955, fig. 9; Burney 1970, 170; Muscarella 1974, 45; Nobari 2005, 273; Negahban 1996, fig. 55; Khanmohammadi 2010, 14; Sattarnezhad et al. 2020, 80
3	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Taleghan		Haddadian et al. 2018, 127; Haerinck 1988, 67–68, pls. 58–59; Nighshineh 2010, 83
4	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Jafarabad		Iravani Ghadim et al. 2012, 47
5	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Jafarabad		Iravani Ghadim et al. 2012, 46
6	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Jafarabad, Taleghan		Iravani Ghadim 2010
7	Qara Hasanlu	Iron I and II		Jafarabad		Haerinck 1988, 67–68, pls. 58–59; Naghshineh 2010, 83; Iravani Ghadim 2010

Table 2: Parthian pottery from Qara Hasanlu (by authors).

No	Site	Period	Illustration	Comp. provenance	Comp. illustration	Comp. reference
1	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Harsin, Nahavand		Mohammadifar et al. 2015, 203; Jafarizadesh and Saraghi 2015, 32
2	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Sefidrud of Rudbar, northern Iran		Kazemi Luyeh et al. 2021, 255; Haerinck 1997, 172, fig. 24: 2
3	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Sistan		Mehrafarin et al. 2011, 248; Mehrafarin et al. 2013, 112
4	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Sistan		Mehrafarin et al. 2013, 111; Mehrafarin et al. 2011, 248
5	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Qala Boynu Yogun (Nir), Harsin, Nahavand plain		Pourfaraj 2017, 50-52; Mohammadifar et al. 2015, 203; Mehrafarin et al. 2012, 17; Jafarizadeh and Saraghi 2015, 32; Kazemi Luyeh et al. 2021, 255
6	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Kohna Pasgah Tapasi, Khodaafarin		Aghalari and Dehpahlavan 2011, 29; Salimi 2018, 151; Kazemi et al. 2021, 258
7	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Nahavand plain, Mahneshan (Zanjan), Sefidrud, Azad Dam (Kurdistan)		Keal 1981, 40-45; Tadahiko et al. 2004, fig. 40-49, 52, 57; Kleiss 1970, abb. 27: 7



No	Site	Period	Illustration	Comp. provenance	Comp. illustration	Comp. reference
8	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Qala Boynu Yogun, Sefidrud plain (Rudbar), Nahavand, Harsin, Chareh (Gilan)		Pourfaraj 2017, 50–52; Bagherian 2005; Haer-inck 1997, 177; Kazemi Luyeh et al. 2021, 254
9	Qara Hasanlu	Parthian		Qala Boynu Yogun, Germi, Qosha Tepe		Pourfaraj 2017, 44; Kambakhshfard 1965; Jmiri and Zare Khalili 2004, 85–88

on the main platform and one was recovered in the mudbrick surface of an extension to the southwest corner of the main platform. Two burial positions of supine and squatting were recorded. As the name implies, the pit graves contained no discernible architectural structures. They generally lacked regular shapes and had circular ends that gave them a quasi-oval shape. Indeed, simple inhumation as a mortuary custom prevailed throughout the prehistoric and historical periods of Iranian archaeology<sup>9</sup>. Such burials of a Parthian date are known from Sadeh Eskandar (Alexander's Wall) near Jorjan<sup>10</sup>, Cheshmeh Sar district near Persepolis<sup>11</sup>, Valiran<sup>12</sup>, Noruzmahale<sup>13</sup>, Hassani Mahale and Ghalekuti<sup>14</sup>, Juban<sup>15</sup>, Vaskeh and Marian<sup>16</sup>, Sang Shir<sup>17</sup>, Khangah Gilavan<sup>18</sup>, Eshkeft Sisar, Sardasht<sup>19</sup>, the Sefidroud basin of Rudbar<sup>20</sup>, and southwestern Salmas.<sup>21</sup>

Coins are popular items placed as gifts in the graves by the Parthians. The coin from the mouth of a skeleton buried with its mouth open at Tepe Qara Hasanlu leaves no doubt about the Parthian date of the pertinent burial. Iranians in the Parthian period customarily placed coinage in the mouth of the deceased following an established tradition seemingly adopted from the Greeks through the Seleucids, who believed that the deceased would need it to pay the boatman Charon or Kharon, who would ferry their souls across the mythic rivers Styx and Charon.<sup>22</sup> The cemetery of Germi with its jar burials is a notable example of Parthian cemeteries attesting to the tradition. The dating of the jar burial cemetery in Germi rests on the discovered coins dating to the first and second centuries AD.<sup>23</sup> The association of coinage with burials occurs at other cemeteries as well. In particular, the Sang Shir cemetery of Hamedan was dated based on the discovery of coins of Mithridates I, Phraates II and Gotarzes II to the late first half and early second half of the 2nd century AD.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, given the predomination of the Parthian material in the pottery assemblage from Qara Hasanlu and the analogous Parthian pit burials found at other sites, the Qara Hasanlu graves most likely date to the same period. In addition, iron scissors occur at a number of Parthian cemeteries in other sites further afield in Iran. In particular, analogous pieces were discovered at Liyar Sang Bon in the Amlash region from the Parthian tombs<sup>25</sup>, as were from the Parthian cemetery of Vaskeh in Iranian Talish<sup>26</sup>.

What about the jewelry and weapons? What is their chronology?

<sup>9</sup> Ahmadi Vastani 2011, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Kiani 1982, 11–19.

<sup>11</sup> Schmidt 1952, 117–152.

<sup>12</sup> Nemati and Sadraei 2012, 109–110.

<sup>13</sup> Egami *et al.* 1966.

<sup>14</sup> Sono and Fukai 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Khalatbari 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Khalatbari 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Azarnoush 1975, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Rezalou 2007; Tahmasebi 2009, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Salimi *et al.* 2018, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Kazemi Luyeh *et al.* 2021, 251.

<sup>21</sup> Solecki 1999, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Woolly 1967, 98 as cited in Nemati *et al.* 2016, 121; Jafari Dehaghi 2013,

<sup>23</sup> Kambakhshfard 1998, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Azarnoush 1975, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Jehani 2015, 719.

<sup>26</sup> Khalatbari 2013, 312.

## Conclusions

Analysis of the graves at Qara Hasanlu suggests that the burials were made at an uncertain time after the erection of the platform. This massive mudbrick platform reflects the continuation of an Iron II (1200- 800 BC) and particularly Iron III (800- 550 BC) tradition. The exterior of the structure is formed of three courses of stones overlaid by seven to ten courses of mudbricks. The buttresses and the core nevertheless solely consist of mudbricks right from the base. As the find of primary interest from the site, this platform can be deemed as a continuation of the Iron III (800- 550 BC) platform building tradition attested at Tepe Sialk, Konar Sandal, Nushi, Pasargadae and Persepolis, Dehno, Qoli Darwish, etc. Judging by pottery evidence, earlier occupations existed at Qara Hasanlu as early as the Iron I (1500- 1200 BC) and II periods, and the site was re-settled in the Parthian period. The virtual predominance of the Parthian material in the pottery assemblage evinces protracted coeval occupations at the site. Considering other lines of internal evidence, the following relative chronology appears tenable. After a protracted gap in the wake of the earlier Iron Age settlements, a group of Parthian groups changed the site into a ritual center by erecting there a massive artificial terrace and began to use it intermittently during certain periods of the year. Strong affinities of the mortuary artifactual assemblage from Qara Hasanlu with those of other Parthian settlements and burial grounds across Iran testify to their dating to this period. Consequently, as the ritual implication of the platform faded in the late Parthian period, the local inhabitants seemingly began to use it as a burial ground via cutting quasi-oval pit graves into its upper layers.

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