

# NORTHERN IRAN IN THE IRON AGE II AND III: A NEIGHBOUR OF URARTU?

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## 1. Introduction

The idea for this contribution to the international congress “Urartu and its Neighbors”<sup>1</sup> originated from the finding of a bronze bracelet with an Urartian inscription at Tul-e Talesh in the Iranian province of Gilan. At this site, Iranian archaeologists partly excavated a large Iron Age cemetery with a stone-built dolmen tomb in which the bracelet was found<sup>2</sup>. So far, this marks the easternmost site where an object bearing cuneiform signs in Urartian language has been discovered in course of a scientific excavation<sup>3</sup>.

The interpretation of this find by the excavators is also interesting. According to their opinion, the bracelet is a proof for direct and tight relations between the kingdom of Urartu and a local Iron Age chiefdom which existed in the Talesh region<sup>4</sup>. Due to a number of typological parallels between some finds from the dolmen at Tul-e Talesh and the grave inventories from Tappeh Marlik in the southern part of Gilan, the excavators propose that both sites are contemporary, thus implying that the necropolis of Marlik

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I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. M.R. Khalatbari for the permission to take part in the excavations at Tappeh Jalaliyeh/Kaluraz in September 2008. This participation and the exploratory trips to Shahryeri and the Talesh Region in April 2008 would not have been possible without the kind help of Mr. H. Eskordi from Shiraz. Finally, I would like to thank my teacher Prof. Dr. St. Kroll for introducing me to the archaeology of Northern Iran and Urartu.

<sup>2</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 35-38, 85 Fig. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Khalatbari 2004: 63-64, also mentions two bronze cheek pieces of a horse harness from illegal excavations which were published by R. Ghirshman. The alleged provenance from Amlash cannot be verified and was obviously used as “fashionable origin” for the art market. This phenomenon has been described by Overlaet 1995: 95-97. Therefore, these objects will not be considered in this article. Furthermore, two fragmented cylinder seals with cuneiform inscriptions from Marlik are also classified by Khalatbari 2004a: 63-64, as Urartian. In fact, they are Middle Assyrian. See Negahban 1996: 211-212.

<sup>4</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 66-67; Khalatbari 2004b: 137-138. A conical bronze helmet from Grave 2 at Mianroud was compared by the excavator with Urartian types, but it is more likely that this object belongs to the Achaemenid period. See Khalatbari 2004b: 214 Fig. 20, for some typical Achaemenid bronze bracelets from the same grave.

has to be dated to the Urartian period<sup>1</sup>. Although this approach was later disputed by other authors<sup>2</sup>, it is still necessary to take a closer look on this subject area.

Therefore, this article is focusing on three main fields. First, it is intended to summarize the current state of research in the area and to investigate the possible contacts between Urartu and Northern Iran. Second, it aims to give a re-assessment of the aforementioned chronological implications of the find. Third, it should draw the attention of the reader to an area that often remains unconsidered in connection to the archaeology of Urartu (Tab. IX).

## **2.1. Urartu in the East**

The presence of the kingdom of Urartu on the territory of modern Iran has been underestimated for quite a long time. Research started only in the late 1960s, when the German Archaeological Institute in Tehran conducted a number of exploratory trips to the north-western provinces of the country. One of the results was the discovery of the large Urartian fortress of Bastam, followed by its excavation between 1968 and 1977. These investigations were supplemented by a number of surveys on the territory of Iranian Azerbaijan, which led to the detection of numerous Urartian sites in the region<sup>3</sup>. Shortly before the Islamic Revolution, the investigated area was extended to the east. Of particular importance are the explorations of German archaeologists in Eastern Azerbaijan<sup>4</sup> and a British survey in the region of Meshkinshahr<sup>5</sup>. In the vicinity of Nashteban, Kroll discovered an Iron Age fortress with buttressed walls that showed certain similarities with Urartian architecture, but he did not find diagnostic pottery there<sup>6</sup>. In summary, there were no clear signs of Urartian presence east of Ahar at that time<sup>7</sup>. Kroll also observed a number of differences between the western and eastern parts of Iranian Azerbaijan. In the west, there was a comparatively larger number of tells or tepes, while such sites were rare in the east. Here, mostly graveyards have been found. Therefore, Kroll came to the conclusion that this region was not densely populated before the earlier 1st millennium BC and might have been used primarily by nomadic or semi-nomadic groups<sup>8</sup>.

Recent Iranian research in the region indicates that the situation is much more complex than previously thought. Of particular interest is the site of Shahryeri on the

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<sup>1</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 67.

<sup>2</sup> Vahdati 2007; Piller 2008: 50, 177, 184, 227.

<sup>3</sup> A bibliography of these investigations by W. Kleiss and St. Kroll can be found at Salvini 1995: 222-224.

<sup>4</sup> Kroll 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Ingraham, Summers 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Kroll 1984: 43-47, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Kroll 1984: 128.

<sup>8</sup> Kroll 1984: 126-127.

western banks of the Qara Su River. This large fortified settlement and the nearby site with stone cist graves and a number of stone stelae with relief decoration had already been discovered by Ingraham and Summers on the aforementioned survey to the Meshkinshahr region and became known as Arjaq Qal'eh<sup>1</sup>. Only recently, Iranian archaeologists investigated and partly excavated the site, but so far, there is no adequate publication. Therefore we have to rely on preliminary remarks and observations by other authors.

Soundings within the fortified area revealed a crude stone architecture of comparatively simple outline. The finds from this area were reduced to just a few pottery sherds of grey-black and brownish red colour which indicate a date within the early 1st millennium BC, while other parts of the site belong to the Parthian or the Medieval Period. So far, more than 400 stelae were detected at Shahryeri (Tab. X/1), some of them being arranged in rows to form a corridor, while others were later reused for the construction of stone cist graves. These stelae always follow more or less the same pattern with highly stylized human face and hands and depictions of a belt and a dagger or sword (Tab. X/2). Normally, the belts and the sheaths of the weapons are decorated with simple geometric ornaments. It would be highly interesting to compare these representations with original objects, but due to the simple delineations on the stelae, this is virtually impossible. In some cases, the hilts and pommels seem to represent so called swords with ear-like pommels (Fig. 2a). In fact, some bronze daggers have been found in a number of graves around the stelae. Typologically, these weapons have good comparisons in Northern Iran, especially with the material excavated by de Morgan in the Talesh Region<sup>2</sup>. According to recent studies on the chronology of this area, a date around 1000 BC seems reasonable for these weapons<sup>3</sup>. This, in turn, indicates that the stelae could at least partially date to the later 2nd millennium BC<sup>4</sup>.

Evidence for the presence of Urartu in this area was provided by two rock inscriptions by Argishti II at Nashteban and Razliq, south and south-east of Mount Sabalan<sup>5</sup>. In 1998, a third rock inscription by the same king was discovered at Shisheh, north of the Sabalan Massive, attesting the presence of Urartian troops in the region around 700 BC<sup>6</sup>. Nearby, remains of graves and a fortress of possibly Iron Age date have been surveyed. But again, no Urartian pottery was found at this site<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ingraham, Summers: 1979: 70-77. A summary of the Iranian excavations at this site can be found at Azarnoush, Helwing 2005: 215-217.

<sup>2</sup> From the Russian Talesh see De Morgan 1896: 63, Fig. 56, 9-10 from Hiveri and Tülü and De Morgan 1896: 67, Fig. 63, 1-7, from Veri.

<sup>3</sup> Piller 2008: 239-240. The daggers from Shahryeri resemble finds from the latest chronological stage in the cemetery Tappeh Marlik.

<sup>4</sup> A similar date had already been proposed by Ingraham, Summers 1979: 76; see also Schachner 2001b: 133-134.

<sup>5</sup> First published by Benedict 1965; a re-assessment can be found at André-Salivni, Salvini 1997 and Salvini 2008, 542-544.

<sup>6</sup> Bashash Khanzaq *et al.* 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Bashash Khanzaq *et al.* 2001: 29.

Although it was known before that Argishti has led campaigns to the lands east of Lake Urumiyeh, the discovery of these rock inscriptions shed a new light on the Urartian expansion in Eastern Azerbaijan<sup>1</sup>. In fact, it has recently been stated that the Urartian Empire reached its largest extension under the reign of Argishti II, stretching from Altintepe in the west to the high plains surrounding Mount Sabalan in the east<sup>2</sup>. According to the current state of research, a river that could be identified with the Qara Su marked the easternmost point the Urartian troops reached in the area<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, it could be possible that the Middle Iron Age fortress of Shahryeri was one of the sites mentioned in the rock inscriptions of Argishti II.

According to the published translation, one of the words that were used by Argishti II in his rock inscriptions could be interpreted as “garrison” and thus might reflect the first stage of an intended Urartian occupation of the territory east of Mount Sabalan<sup>4</sup>. As mentioned above, there are indeed some Iron Age fortifications that show a certain resemblance to some well known Urartian construction techniques, but so far, there is virtually no evidence for the existence of an Urartian fortification system in this region<sup>5</sup>. Only recently, Iranian archaeologists were able to collect some survey finds of possibly Urartian pottery from the small natural mound of Boini Yoghon which is situated a few kilometres south-east of Nashteban<sup>6</sup>. Further research is needed to clarify the background to these highly interesting survey finds.

From Boini Yoghon, it is easily possible to move on farther east, cross the high plateau of Eastern Azerbaijan and reach the western foothills of the Talesh Mountains, where a flourishing Iron Age culture existed at that time. The aforementioned cemetery of **Tul-e Talesh** is less than 50 kilometres from Boini Yoghon, without any major geographical obstacles in between. It can be assumed that this area served as some kind of contact zone between the inhabitants of the high plateau and those of the Caspian Sea. The typological background for the Shahryeri weapons and the parallels with an anthropomorphic stone stele from the vicinity of Astara<sup>7</sup> provide interesting insights to this subject area. Nevertheless, a closer look on the evidence from Talesh is needed to gain a better understanding of the situation during the Iron Age.

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<sup>1</sup> Salvini 1995: 102.

<sup>2</sup> Salvini 2009: 204.

<sup>3</sup> Salvini 1995: 102.

<sup>4</sup> Bashash Khanzaq *et al.* 2001: 36.

<sup>5</sup> Kroll 1984: 128.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication by St. Kroll.

<sup>7</sup> Schachner 2001b: 133-134.

## 2.2. The **Talesh Region**: a short history of research

Geographically, the Talesh Mountains represent the north-western extension of the Alborz Mountains and separate the highlands of Eastern Azerbaijan from the Caspian Sea. After the Russo-Persian War of 1826 to 1828, the northern parts of Talesh became part of the Russian Empire while the rest remained with the Persian province of Gilan.

The western and eastern flanks of the Talesh Mountains differ from each other remarkably with regards to their environmental and climatic conditions<sup>1</sup>. Due to the orographic rainfall that emerges from the Caspian Sea, the eastern sides of the mountains are densely forested and humid, while the western flanks are lying in the rain shadow of the main mountain crest and share a continental climate with the adjacent high plateau of the inland. In contrast to the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, there are no large alluvial plains in the Talesh region. Here, the coastal plain is reduced to a narrow strip of land that is intensively used for agriculture, mostly for the cultivation of rice. Access to the mountains is possible via numerous valleys and erosion gullies, where creeks or small rivers are running down from the mountains (Tab. XI/1). Most of the steep mountain flanks are covered with forests and subtropical vegetation. Agriculture is limited to a few high valleys such as at the area of Aq Evlar. The region above the tree line and parts of the western flanks were traditionally used by the Taleshi people for herding and livestock breeding during the hot summer months.

Archaeological research in Talesh started already in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Jaques de Morgan visited the Russian parts of the region in 1896. De Morgan began his scientific exploration tour in the town of Lenkoran at the shores of the Caspian Sea and followed one of the river valleys into the forested mountains<sup>2</sup>. Along the way, he conducted a number of soundings in the **numerous prehistoric graveyards** of the area. In 1901, another tour led him to the Persian parts of Talesh. This time, he worked in the high valley of Aq Evlar and crossed the main crest of the mountains to explore also parts of the western flanks around the village of Namin<sup>3</sup>. The results of these investigations were published shortly afterwards and were later used to create a **chronological framework for this region**<sup>4</sup>. **But, for different reasons, these attempts can be considered as obsolete now.** Unfortunately, de Morgan's activities remained the only archaeological investigations in the Persian parts of the Talesh Region for many decades. In the meantime, the formerly Russian Talesh became part of the Soviet Union and was partly investigated by archaeological expeditions from the mid-20th century onwards. **But, due to the science policy of the Soviet authorities, the results of these excavations remained almost completely inaccessible for Western scholars**<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information see Ehlers 1981 and Gehrke, Mehner 1975.

<sup>2</sup> De Morgan 1896: 14-16.

<sup>3</sup> De Morgan 1905.

<sup>4</sup> The attempts to do so were made by De Morgan 1927 and Schaeffer 1948.

<sup>5</sup> See also Schachner 2001a: 251-252.

On the other hand, archaeological research on the Iranian side of the border was virtually non-existent, the only exception being the aforementioned survey by Kroll in the later 1970s. These investigations were mainly concentrating in Eastern Azerbaijan and Ardebil, but Kroll visited also some sites in Gilan that were already known by the earlier explorations of de Morgan<sup>1</sup>.

It wasn't until 1992, more than 90 years after the first excavations by De Morgan in the Persian Talesh, that the reorganized Iranian archaeological service started extensive research in the Talesh region<sup>2</sup>. Again, these investigations were almost exclusively concentrated on the excavation of Iron Age graveyards, the most important being the cemetery of Tul-e Talesh.

Tul-e Talesh (or Tul-e Gilan) is a small village on the western flanks of the Talesh Mountains, not far from the present border to the province of Ardebil. Administratively, the area belongs to the district of Hashtpar (formerly Talesh) in the province of Gilan. During the summer time, about forty families are living here. At this time of the year, the village is surrounded by green pastures that are particularly suitable for animal husbandry and stock breeding.

In the autumn, most of the inhabitants leave the higher elevations of the Talesh Mountains. In Tul, only two families stay to take care of the village. The others move down to the fertile high valley of Aq Evlar or the coastal plain of the Caspian Sea near Hashtpar, harvest their crops and stay over the winter time. After having prepared the wheat fields and rice paddies for the next season, these families return to Tul-e Talesh again to spend the summer in the pleasant climate of this area.

Interestingly, the remarkable difference between the sedentary farmers of southern Gilan and the seasonal animal husbandry of the Taleshi people were already attested by the German traveller Adam Olearius, who passed this area on his way to the court of the Shah at Isfahan in 1637<sup>3</sup>. It may be assumed that the above described lifestyle dates back to prehistoric times and therefore could have a considerable impact on the archaeological research in the area.

Adobe or mud brick architecture is completely missing in the traditional architecture of the Talesh Region. Until recently, the Taleshi people erected just semicircular hut-like housings in their summer camps. These so called "pargas"<sup>4</sup> consist of bent wooden rafters which were covered with felt or other material and had to be re-built every spring (Tab. XI/2). After a certain period of time, such constructions do barely leave any traces in the archaeological record. Therefore, the archaeology of the Talesh Region is almost entirely based on the excavations of burial places.

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<sup>1</sup> Kroll 1984: 53-58. Most of these sites are now part of the province of Ardebil.

<sup>2</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 15.

<sup>3</sup> Olearius 1959: 467-468.

<sup>4</sup> Kasraian 1996: 7.

Since 2002, Iranian archaeologists from the Cultural Heritage Organisation of Gilan discovered and partly excavated a number of prehistoric graveyards in the surroundings of Tul village. First results were edited in a monograph<sup>1</sup>, but until now, the majority of the finds and their contexts remain unpublished.

### 2.3. Remarks on chronology

As outlined above, archaeological research in Talesh started earlier than in most other areas of Iran. But, due to different reasons, it is still difficult to establish a detailed chronological system for the region. Other parts of Iran, such as the north-western area around Lake Urumiyeh, had been much better investigated during the 1960s and 1970s. Due to the reduced state of research, the Iron Age cultures of Northern Iran were sometimes sweepingly treated as part of the Western Grey Ware tradition and were even suspected as “kulturelles Niemandsland”<sup>2</sup>.

It was not until 1988 that the first modern scientific attempt to create a chronology for the Iron Age of Gilan was presented<sup>3</sup>. At that time, Haerinck based his work not only on the absolute chronology of north-western Iran, but also on the terminology created by Young and Dyson. Therefore, he established three phases and labelled them as Iron Age I, II and III<sup>4</sup>. Due to material from excavated and published cemeteries such as Marlik and Ghalekuti, Iron Age I seemed to be a phase of high importance and long duration. Haerinck proposed a date between the 15th/14th and the 11th centuries for this period. In contrast, material of Iron Age II was restricted to only a few contexts, indicating a transitory character for this phase. In absolute dates, this phase should fall roughly within the 10th to 9th centuries BC. Finally, Iron Age III covers the period between the 8th and 6th centuries BC before the Achaemenid era begins<sup>5</sup>. This phase is characterized by the appearance of an orange to brick red fine pottery, the so called Orange Ware<sup>6</sup>.

According to this scheme, the Urartian expansion towards the neighbouring regions of Northern Iran in course of the later 8th and early 7th centuries BC clearly falls within the Iron Age III period. Interestingly enough, Haerinck noticed “obvious changes” in the cultural sequence of Gilan in this period, including the appearance of a new pottery tradition and the increasing use of iron for the production of weapons<sup>7</sup>. Due

<sup>1</sup> Khalatbari 2004a; see also Khalatbari 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Löw 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Haerinck 1988. In fact, Haerinck was the first author who included the available information from the excavations that took place in course of the 1960s and 1970s in the southern parts of Gilan. This includes Marlik, Ghalekuti, Kaluraz, Tomadjan and Lameh Zamin.

<sup>4</sup> Haerinck 1988: 64, 67-73.

<sup>5</sup> Another article by the same author dealing with the Achaemenid period in Gilan was published just one year later. See Haerinck 1989. Here, he consequently pursued his terminology and proposed to call this period Iron Age IV.

<sup>6</sup> Dyson 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Haerinck 1988: 73.

to the limited state of research, the backgrounds of these changes in the material culture remain obscure<sup>1</sup>. So far, external influences are not detectable.

One of the main results of Haerinck's article is the identification of a later re-use of some Iron Age I stone cist graves during the Iron Age III period. This conclusion was mainly based on his examination of the burial goods from Grave 14 at Tomadjan and a re-evaluation of the well documented Japanese excavations at Ghalekuti<sup>2</sup>. The occurrence of a bronze fibula in Grave 36 at Marlik<sup>3</sup> was also ascribed to a re-use of this late 2nd millennium stone tomb during the Iron Age III. Other authors were heavily influenced by Haerinck's ideas. For example, Löw proposed a similar re-use for quite a few graves at Marlik and classified the material from this site into two chronological periods: Iron Age I (end of the 2nd millennium BC) and Iron Age II/III (early 1st millennium BC)<sup>4</sup>. In fact, a detailed analysis of the necropolis of Marlik has proven that the vast majority of the finds very probably belong to the closing centuries of the second millennium BC. There are virtually no objects that can be securely dated to the period after ca. 1000 BC<sup>5</sup>.

#### 2.4. Tul-e Talesh Dolmen 1 – context, finds and interpretation

Usually, the excavated graves at Tul-e Talesh are simple stone cists for single inhumations. An exception is represented by Tomb 1, a large and well-constructed dolmen<sup>6</sup> type grave measuring 2 by 16 metres (Fig. 1a). According to the excavators, only a small part of the tomb was disturbed by illegal diggings, while the main part of it was found intact and was not plundered<sup>7</sup>.

Near the western end of the dolmen, a kind of chamber was separated from the rest of the tomb by a stone setting. Inside this chamber, only one skeleton, lying in flexed position on its left side was found<sup>8</sup>. The burial goods consist mainly of personal ornaments and jewellery such as pearls, necklaces, ear rings and pendants (Tab. XII/1).

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<sup>1</sup> The possible explanations given by Haerinck 1988: 73-74, are clearly influenced by the new theories of T.C. Young, who connects the appearance of the Western Buff Ware horizon in north-western Iran with the appearance of the Iranian tribes.

<sup>2</sup> Haerinck 1988: 65. Both sites are situated in the Dailaman Region in the southern part of Gilan. Until recently, this high valley was used as summer resort for the inhabitants of the Caspian lowlands, thus having a function that is comparable to that of the higher elevations in the Talesh Mountains.

<sup>3</sup> When this fibula was first published by Muscarella 1984: 415-417, he proposed a date within the late 8th and 7th centuries BC.

<sup>4</sup> Löw 1998: 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> Piller 2008: 242-246.

<sup>6</sup> The expression "dolmen" was introduced to the region by De Morgan, due to their resemblance to stone tombs from France.

<sup>7</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 35.

<sup>8</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 36. Nevertheless, it is virtually impossible to determine the original orientation of the skeleton. Khalatbari speaks of N-E, but it remains unclear if this is the orientation of the skull or of the whole body.

A number of hollow tubes of silver sheet metal are interpreted by Khalatbari as “cover of dagger or sword”<sup>1</sup>. It should be noted, however, that no such weapon is known so far from the whole region. Therefore, it is highly likely that these silver objects served another purpose. In fact, they can be compared with nearly identical golden beads from Metsamor and other sites in Armenia<sup>2</sup>. It is highly probable that the main inhumation of the dolmen tomb was that of a female individual<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, a number of ceramic vessels are mentioned in the excavation report, but, due to a lack of detailed publications, it is not clear which pottery finds do belong to this main inhumation. There were only a few photographs taken in course of the excavation, but none of them shows the situation in the separated burial chamber. This makes it impossible to identify the pottery vessels that were associated with this burial<sup>4</sup>.

In front of the chamber, five other skeletons were excavated, most of them equipped with bronze or bi-metallic weapons. Due to the humid conditions in the area, the human bones were often completely decayed and could not be examined by an anthropologist. In addition to the weapons, a large number of personal ornaments and necklaces consisting of frit beads were found. Especially noteworthy is a small golden beaker with geometric ornamentation which was associated with a warrior burial near the entrance of the tomb (Fig. 1b). One of the most spectacular objects found in this tomb is represented by the aforementioned bronze bracelet with an Urartian inscription (Fig. 4a)<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, Khalatbari never mentions the exact context of the bracelet, but Bashash Kanzaq notes that it was found at the surface layer of the tomb<sup>6</sup>. It remains also unclear if this find was associated with one of the described burials.

Although the excavator seems to be aware of the fact that this type of dolmen tomb was in use over a certain period of time for successive interments, he states that the finds from this grave are more or less contemporary<sup>7</sup>. This, in turn, leads him to the conclusion that all the objects from the dolmen should be dated to the Urartian Period, i.e. the 8th or 7th centuries BC. Khalatbari also mentions the fact that a considerable number of golden and silver objects were found in the dolmen, indicating that that owner of the tomb was indeed worth to receive such a “royal” present<sup>8</sup>.

According to Bashash Kanzaq, the inscription can be read as “Argishti’s gift”<sup>9</sup>. As to the exact date of the bracelet, Kanzaq postulates that it was produced during the reign of a king named Argishti. He further concludes that Argishti II was not powerful

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<sup>1</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 37.

<sup>2</sup> Kalantaryan 2007: Pl. LXX,1. These objects were dated to the 12th to 9th centuries BC.

<sup>3</sup> This may also be true for graves 10 and 23 at Marlik, where no weapons were found. Compare Negahban 1996: 29, 32; Piller 2008: 134-135.

<sup>4</sup> This was also criticized by Vahdati 2007, 129.

<sup>5</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 57.

<sup>6</sup> Bashash Kanzaq 2004: 98.

<sup>7</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 38.

<sup>8</sup> Khalatbari 2004a: 63-67.

<sup>9</sup> Bashash Kanzaq 2004: 99.

enough to control the Talesh Region and therefore assigns the bracelet to Argishti I. and his father Menua<sup>1</sup>.

Razmjou proposes that “that at least some cuneiform signs are missing and that the correct translation should be “Argishti’s son granted”<sup>2</sup>. Formulations like this are normally found on objects which were intended to be part of a votive ceremony. Such items used to be stored in a royal or temple magazine and were not intended to be given away as gifts or tribute to other peoples or their rulers. Razmjou assigns the inscription to Argishti II and refers to other inscribed bronze objects by the same king which were allegedly also found in Gilan<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, these finds are all from the art market and can under no circumstances be used for a scientific evaluation of the bracelet from Tul-e Talesh.

On the other hand, Razmjou is certainly right when he writes that this find “has not been made as bracelet so it has been part of another object”<sup>4</sup>. According to the intended purpose of such items, inscriptions on Urartian bronze objects normally are clearly visible, while the cuneiform signs on the Tul bracelet are on its inner side. Furthermore, parts of the original inscription were damaged by rivet holes or the overlapping pieces of the bracelet.

In his re-assessment of the excavations at Tul-e Talesh, Vahdati comes to the same conclusions. He also notes that the bracelet had been riveted together from different parts of another bronze object and emphasizes the striking difference between the “clumsily incised herringbone patterns” on the outer side of the bracelet and the artistic Urartian metalwork, especially on objects bearing a royal inscription<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, it should be noted that Urartian bracelets normally do not bear inscriptions.

Vahdati also proves that the finds from the grave are not contemporary. For the jewellery items and personal ornaments from the main chamber, close comparisons are available in graves 10, 23 and 50 from Marlik. Vahdati dates these burials to the “last centuries of the 2nd millennium BC”<sup>6</sup>. Disc pendants, ear rings and garment pins of comparable shape were found in numerous sites in Iran, the Levant and the southern Caucasus, were they can be dated to the 16th to 13th centuries BC<sup>7</sup>. Almost identical golden disc pendants with astral ornaments are known from Marlik Grave 23 in southern Gilan and Lori Berd Grave 33 in northern Armenia<sup>8</sup>. These objects were dated independently from each other to the Late Bronze Age between the 15th/14th to 13th centuries BC<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bashash Kanzaq 2004, 98.

<sup>2</sup> Razmjou 2004: 105.

<sup>3</sup> Razmjou 2004, 106.

<sup>4</sup> Razmjou 2004: 106.

<sup>5</sup> Vahdati 2007: 132-134.

<sup>6</sup> Vahdati 2007, 129, 135. It has recently been postulated that these Graves 10 and 23 belong to the same chronological phase in the cemetery of Marlik. See Piller 2008: 214-215. For the special case of Grave 50, see Piller 2008: 227-228.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed summary see Maxwell-Hyslop 1971: 138-157.

<sup>8</sup> Negahban 1996: Pl. 54, Nr. 189; Kalantaryan 2007: Pl. XLVI, 3. Unfortunately, this grave was partially robbed before excavation. The remaining finds include parts of two horse skeletons, some silver and golden buttons, and beads of carnelian and dark amber.

<sup>9</sup> According to Kalantaryan 2007: 133, the hitherto unpublished pottery from Grave 33 at Lori Berd

In contrast, most of the weapons and a considerable number of the published pottery vessels belong to the Iron Age II<sup>1</sup>. This is also true for the warrior burial with the golden cup at the right hand of the deceased. Around the badly preserved skeleton, 63 arrow heads of different shapes, a large socketed bronze spear head and a long sword with iron blade and bronze hilt were found. This combination of numerous weapons and a decorated vessel of precious metal is reminiscent of the Northern Iranian tradition of well equipped elite burials at such sites as Marlik, Kaluraz, Ghalekuti and Kelar Dasht. **Typologically, the sword belongs to the type with so called “ear-like pommels” (Fig. 2a)** which is distributed mainly in the Talesh Region, but also in adjacent territories of Azerbaijan (Uzuntepe) as well as in northern and north-western Armenia<sup>2</sup>. Similar weapons are also present in the destruction level of Hasanlu IVB<sup>3</sup>. Swords of this type can have a bronze or iron blade of considerable length with a cast-on bronze hilt. Bi-metallic objects such as this have been designated as “Leitfossil” of the Iron Age II (10th to 9th centuries BC)<sup>4</sup>.

A distinguished type of large socketed bronze spearheads with triangular blades also seems to be typical of the early first millennium BC in Northern Iran. This type often appears in combination with a socketed object which is decorated with bronze knobs<sup>5</sup> and with bi-metallic swords. A spearhead of this type was already found by De Morgan in Dolmen 3 at Aq Evlar (Agha-Evlar) together with two iron spearheads and a fragmented bi-metallic sword with iron blade and bronze pommel. A nearly identical sword was also found in the dolmen tomb of Tul-e Talesh<sup>6</sup>, indicating a close chronological and typological relationship between these contexts. Today, Aq Evlar is the winter resort for some families who stay at Tul-e Talesh during the summertime. A comparable constellation can also be suggested for the first millennium BC.

Another type which is **often produced in a bi-metallic** technique are the so called swords with disc-shaped or cotton-reel pommels (Fig. 2b)<sup>7</sup>. The bronze parts of these weapons are often decorated with fine punched and incised geometric ornaments, while the blades can have a sophisticated cast surface with plastic midribs and ridges<sup>8</sup>. According

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belongs to an early phase of the Late Bronze Age. Grave 23 at Marlik can be attributed to the first chronological stage of the cemetery. See Piller 2008: 214.

<sup>1</sup> Typical for the Iron Age II are crudely made vessels with plastic decoration. See Haerinck 1988: 72. Illustrations of Iron Age II pottery from Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh can be found at Khalatbari 2004a: 80-81, Fig. 38-45.

<sup>2</sup> See Pogrebova 1977: 51-58, Map 4, for the distribution of the type. A bi-metallic sword of this type was found in the cemetery of Horom in north-western Armenia and has been dated by the excavators to the 11th to 9th centuries BC. Personal communication by the excavator R. Badalyan.

<sup>3</sup> Piggott 1989: 72., Fig 8. So far, it is not clear if these finds belong to the invaders or the defenders of the site.

<sup>4</sup> Piggott 1989: 74.

<sup>5</sup> For example Fukai, Ikeda 1971: Pl. XLIV, 2-3 and Khalatbari 2004: 83, Fig. 51,7.

<sup>6</sup> Compare De Morgan 1905: 328, Fig. 797 with Khalatbari 2004a: 83, Fig. 50 upper right.

<sup>7</sup> For example Fukai, Ikeda 1971: Pl. Subtypes were also found in Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh. Compare Khalatbari 2004a: 83-84.

<sup>8</sup> As it is virtually impossible to create such decoration on iron blades, bronze was obviously used for the production of such swords.

to this decoration and the thinness of the blades, it is highly likely that at least some of these swords were never used in combat and had just a decorative and prestige purpose<sup>1</sup>.

Haerinck proposed a linear chronological order for this type of sword. According to his opinion, swords which consist completely of bronze belong to the Iron Age I, while bi-metallic example with bronze hilt and iron blade are from the Iron Age II. In Iron Age III, such weapons are completely made of iron. A re-assessment of the available material from Tomadjan by the author showed that Haerinck relied too closely on the illustrations of the preliminary publications by Samadi. A detailed evaluation of the text reveals that the finds depicted in the figures are not necessarily always from the same context. In fact, objects from different burials have often been mixed in one illustration<sup>2</sup>. This was the main reason why Haerinck misinterpreted the inventory of Tomb 14 at Tomadjan<sup>3</sup>. The simple bronze dagger blades with long, narrow tang and a so-called “dagger with barbs”<sup>4</sup> illustrated together with the disc-pommel sword from that grave<sup>5</sup> prompted him to postulate that there was a stone-built cist tomb from the Iron Age I which was re-used in course of the Iron Age II or III. In fact, the “dagger with barbs”<sup>6</sup> was not found in Grave 14, but in another burial at Tomadjan, while bronze blades with long tangs still occur in the early 1st millennium BC<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, Haerinck came to the conclusion that stone built chamber tombs

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<sup>1</sup> Piller, Puttkammer 2010: 172.

<sup>2</sup> It is quite easy to misinterpret Samadi’s publication. For example, in Samadi 1960: 191, Fig. 27, seven bronze weapons are illustrated to be from Grave 14 at Amlash (in fact, the graves were not excavated at Amlash, but at Tomadjan in the Dailaman Region): one axe, one socketed spearhead, one dagger with cotton-reel pommel and three simple daggers with tang. Apart from the fact that the axe is most probably of iron, the text reveals clearly that only three bronze daggers were found in Grave 14. See Samadi 1960: 192.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Samadi’s description of the pottery from this grave is rather obscure. He writes “*Parmi tous les poteries trouvées dans cette tombe, deux seulement on tunc forme originale et comportent une anse et un long bec. Elles sont en terre cuite rouge.*” See Samadi 1960: 192-193. Such a description would fit everything between the Late Bronze Age and the Parthian period.

<sup>4</sup> This designation was taken from the excavation reports of Ghalekuti, where such weapons have been excavated from various Late Bronze or Early Iron Age graves. See Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: Pl. LIV, 36-40, Pl. LXII, 12 and Fukai, Ikeda 1971: Pl. LII, 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Samadi 1959: 36, Fig. 34.

<sup>6</sup> According to their positioning in the well documented graves of Ghalekuti I it becomes clear that these objects are not daggers but spear heads. See Egami, Fukai Masuda 1965: Pl. L and LXI; Fukai, Ikeda 1971: Pl. L. In these tombs, they replace spear heads which occurs in other graves. Compare Fukai, Ikeda, Masuda 1965: Pl. LXIII, Pl. LXXII, Pl. LXXX. Haerinck 1988: 69, recognised that there are no such objects at Marlik and Kaluraz, but he thought this is a sociological phenomenon. According to his theories, types such as “daggers with barbs” were found only in simple burials and are therefore missing at the elite graveyards of Gilan. In fact, the occurrence of this type seems to be a chronological rather than a sociological factor. Such weapons do only appear in the better equipped burials at Ghalekuti, such as A-V, C-I and E.6. In Grave E.6, a fragmented example of this type was wrapped with a thin golden band. Fukai/Ikeda 1971: 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ghalekuti I, re-use of Grave C-I: Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: Pl. LXXVI, 91; Kaluraz, Pit Grave 1 in Trench 3: Khalatbari 1997: 112.

are typical of the Iron Age I. When he wrote his article, there was no proof for such a sepulchral architecture in the Iron Age III. According to the results from the neighbouring sites of Ghalekuti I, the dead of this period were usually interred in simple earth pits or in re-used stone tombs of the later 2nd millennium BC. The recent Iranian investigations in the Talesh area showed that stone chamber tombs were also built during the Iron Age III and IV<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, double or triple interments can occur in such tombs<sup>2</sup>.

After a detailed examination of the available information, we have to come to the conclusion that there is no material dating to the Iron Age I from Grave 14 at Tomadjan (Fig. 3b). The numerous comparisons with the secondary burials in Grave C-I at Ghalekuti Mound I indicate a similar date within the Iron Age III for one of the interments of the grave. Due to the occurrence of special types of fibulae and earrings, the second inhumation can be attributed to the Achaemenid period (Iron Age IV). Certainly there was no large period of time between both interments.

On the other hand, this is no explanation for the fact that prestige weapons such as the cotton-reel swords are missing at every Iron Age I site investigated so far. It is more likely that this type was developed after the turn of the millennium and does not appear before Iron Age II, i.e. after ca. 1000 BC. It can also be assumed that there is no chronological difference between bi-metallic and bronze examples of this type. The same is obviously true for the contemporary swords with ear pommels. There are some changes towards the Iron Age III period, including an increasing use of iron for weapons or the reduction of the bronze part to the pommel. But bronze weapons – and even comparatively simple shapes such as the swords with long tang - are still produced during that period.

The incised frit beads from the dolmen tomb find good parallels in the secondary burials of Ghalekuti I<sup>3</sup>. According to the Orange Ware associated with them, these burials can be attributed to the Iron Age III (8th to 7th centuries BC). Similar blue frit beads from Tomb 2 at Akhlatian near Sissian in southern Armenia were independently dated to exactly the same period<sup>4</sup>.

Other finds such as an openwork bronze pendant (Fig. 3a) also belong to this period or may even represent the transition to the early Achaemenid Period (Iron Age IV)<sup>5</sup>. Vahdati proposed a similar date between the 6th and 4th centuries BC for the bracelet<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For some examples from Tul-e Talesh, see Khalatbari 2006: 33-55.

<sup>2</sup> Khalatbari 2004c: 103.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Khalatbari 2004a: 89-91, Fig. 71-71, 74-77 with Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: PL. LXXVII, 105-115.

<sup>4</sup> Santrot 1996: 168, Fig 165.

<sup>5</sup> Haerincq 1988: 73. There are a lot of these objects from the art market. Finds from scientific excavations come from Ghalekuti Grave C-I, Tomadjan Grave 14, Vaske Grave 3 and Tul-e Talesh Dolmen 1. See Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: Pl. LXXXIV, 20-21; Samadi 1959: 32, Fig. 30,d; Khalatbari 2004b: 178, Fig. 6, 4-6; Khalatbari 2004a: 85, Fig. 58 left. Moorey 1971: 235-236, proposes a possible Caucasian influence for this type. In fact, Early Iron Age ornaments from the Southern Caucasus are comparable. See Santrot 1996: 111, Fig. 99-100.

<sup>6</sup> Vahdati 2007: 136.

A typological analysis shows that bracelets of this type are unknown from Urartian contexts, but they do appear in a number of sites in the Talesh Region. Similar open bronze bracelets with broadening ends and incised ornaments were already found by De Morgan at Tülü and Djönü in the Russian parts of Talesh<sup>1</sup>, while others were excavated by Khalatbari in at Tul-e Talesh and Maryan in the vicinity of Aq Evlar (Fig. 4b). Some of these bracelets are decorated with simple geometrical ornaments similar to the inscribed example from the dolmen tomb<sup>2</sup>. Therefore it can be assumed that this type was manufactured locally and belongs to the material culture of the Talesh Region.

Evidence for the dating comes from Tomb 20 at Maryan. In this stone cist grave at least three individuals were buried in tightly flexed position in the south-eastern part, while most of the grave goods were found pushed together near the opposite side of the chamber<sup>3</sup>. Intermingled with numerous pottery vessels, some short swords, a bronze vessel, a bronze horse bit and a bracelet of the described type were excavated in a scattered position, indicating a successive multiple interment for this grave<sup>4</sup>.

A number of vessels from this tomb represent diagnostic shapes of Iron Age III Orange Ware<sup>5</sup>, while other finds such as a small glass tube which was most probably used as a cosmetic container<sup>6</sup> usually is considered to be a typical object of Iron Age IV graves in Gilan and therefore should be dated to the Achaemenid period<sup>7</sup>. Again, we have to conclude that graves containing such objects most probably do belong to the transitional phase from Iron Age III to IV. In absolute terms, this period could cover the end of the 7th and possibly most of the 6th century BC. A similar or even slightly later date within the 6th to 5th centuries BC was proposed by Vahdati for the bracelet and other finds from the dolmen<sup>8</sup>.

In this context, a similar bracelet which belongs to the items that are ascribed to Deve Hüyük near Karkemish on the present Turkish-Syrian border should be mentioned<sup>9</sup>. Moorey cites parallels from Syria and Iran for this bracelet, but is obviously

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<sup>1</sup> De Morgan 1896, 86, Fig. 89, 2,5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> Khalatbari 2006: 66, Fig. 24-26.

<sup>3</sup> Khalatbari 2004c: 103-104, Fig. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Khalatbari 2004c: 11.

<sup>5</sup> For example Khalatbari 2004c: 211, Fig. 2. This vessel can be compared with finds from the southern part of Gilan. See Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: Pl. LXVI, 1 and Pl. LXXIII, 2 and from Graves B-III and C-I at Ghalekuti I and Negahban 1996: Pl. 101, Nr. 499 from Grave 1 at Zeinab Bejar.

The decorated stand of the jar published by Khalatbari 2004c: 213, Fig. 5 can be designated as diagnostic for the Iron Age III Orange Ware. See Dyson 1979. Small pots on three bent knob legs also appear in Ghalekuti I, Grave B-III. See Egami, Fukai, Masuda 1965: Pl. LXVI, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Khalatbari 2004c: 225, Fig. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hori 1981: 51-54, Fig. 7, 4-5; Haerincq 1989: 458-459.

<sup>8</sup> Vahdati 2007: 136. Later chronological stages might be represented by the cemeteries of Vaske and Mianrud. The pottery from these sites shows virtually no affinities with the classic Iron III Orange Ware. Just one vessel with closed spout and rounded bottom from Grave 1 seems to be reminiscent of it. See Khalatbari 2004b: 198, Fig. 14,5.

<sup>9</sup> Moorey 1980: 78-79, Fig. 12, 295.

not sure about the origin of the type. In fact, the best parallels to the bracelet from Deve Hüyük come from the Talesh Region. Other items such as weapons<sup>1</sup> and some pottery shapes from Deve Hüyük also point towards this area. A characteristic type of lamp with applied decoration of a human face appears both in the material from Deve Hüyük<sup>2</sup> and in some sites in the Talesh area. Lamps of this type have been excavated in Chir-Chir Pori and in graves 12, 19 and 20 at Maryan (Tab. XII/2)<sup>3</sup>. As noted above, Grave 20 at Maryan also contained at least one bronze bracelet of the aforementioned type, thus providing a double link between both contexts. Another interesting find from “Deve Hüyük” is a singular iron short sword that resembles the cotton-reel pommels from Northern Iran<sup>4</sup>.

Interestingly enough, it has been proposed that most of the objects from “Deve Hüyük” are funerary goods of a plundered cemetery where the member of an Achaemenid garrison were buried. Due to the good comparisons, the Talesh Mountains could be the region of origin of these troops<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.5. An Urartian quiver case from Tul-e Talesh**

Another interesting find comes from Grave 24 at Tul-e Talesh. This burial contained a skeleton in flexed position lying on the right side. At least three pottery vessels were placed in front of the body. Above the skull of the deceased, a bronze quiver leaning almost upright against the narrow side of the tomb was excavated (Tab. XIII/1)<sup>6</sup>. Such a positioning for weapons is not uncommon at Tul-e Talesh and was also observed in other graves in this cemetery<sup>7</sup>. The quiver is made of bronze sheet metal with five bands decorated with a zigzag pattern alternating with undecorated zones in between. Two cast bronze suspensions are riveted to the body of the quiver. The back side was made of an organic material, most probably leather, and is not preserved (Tab. XIII/2)<sup>8</sup>.

Quivers made of sheet metal are virtually absent from the material culture of the

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the daggers or short swords from Deve Hüyük belong to the Akinakes type. A similar weapon was found together with a battle axe in Grave 3 at Vaske. See Khalatbari 2004b: 231, Fig. 45, 4 and 7. Such a so called “sagaris” does also occur in the Deve Hüyük Material. Moorey 1980, 63 Fig. 10,220.

<sup>2</sup> Moorey 1980: 24-26, Fig. 5, 61-64.

<sup>3</sup> De Morgan 1905: 306, Fig. 596-597; Khalatbari 2004c: 219, Fig. 7, 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Moorey 1980: 53, 59, Fig. 9, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Moorey 1975. Burials containing a great number of funerary goods such as pottery, personal ornaments and weapons are uncommon for the Achaemenid heartlands, but typical for some of the peripheral areas of the Empire. Particularly, the abundant occurrence of weapons has a long tradition in the burial practices of Northern Iran. This feature can be noticed in all important Bronze and Iron Age cemeteries in Gilan.

<sup>6</sup> Khalatbari 2006: 89, Fig. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication by the excavator M.R. Khalatbari.

<sup>8</sup> Wartke 1990: 58.

Iron Age in Gilan. The only exceptions may occur at Marlik in the southern parts of Gilan, where some graves contained objects which were interpreted as quivers or dagger scabbards<sup>1</sup> (the latter being more likely), but they differ in size, shape and decoration from the Talesh quiver. In contrast, nearly identical quivers with zigzag bands and cast suspension loops are reported from a number of Urartian sites in eastern Anatolia and Armenia<sup>2</sup>. Examples come from Toprakkale<sup>3</sup> or Karmir Blur<sup>4</sup>. After all, we have to conclude that this type of quiver is an Urartian product. Maybe, the quiver from Tul-e Talesh Grave 24 found its way to the east in course of the campaigns of Argishti II around 700 BC. But we should be aware of the fact that we are not able to clarify how and when this piece came to the Talesh Region<sup>5</sup>.

As there is to-date no detailed publication available, the date of Grave 24 remains uncertain. The pottery could be of local Middle Iron Age production, but we have to wait for the publication to give a full assessment of the types and wares. In the meantime, we can assume that this grave may belong to Iron Age III or IV, corresponding to most other burials in this cemetery.

### **3. Summary and conclusions**

The three rock inscriptions by Argishti II at Razliq, Nashteban and Shisheh demonstrate that the Urartian expansion reached the high plains north, south and south-east of Mount Sabalan around 700 BC. Most probably the Urartians erected garrisons in the region, but further evidence for a strong Urartian presence is hard to obtain. Although some of the prehistoric fortified places near the rock inscriptions resemble Urartian building techniques, no definite Urartian fortress has been discovered in the area so far. Future research has to evaluate the background of the Urartian pottery finds at the small site of Boini Yoghon south-east of Nashteban. From here, it would have been an easy task for the Urartian army to move farther east and to reach the western flanks of the Talesh Mountains, where a flourishing Iron Age culture existed during that period.

At Tul-e Talesh, a prehistoric cemetery situated on the western edge of the Talesh Region, some possibly Urartian artefacts have been excavated. Most spectacular is the finding of an inscribed bronze bracelet in Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh. This object was interpreted by the excavator as a royal gift and a clear proof for direct contacts between Urartu and Talesh. A detailed analysis of this object revealed that it was made of a fragmented Urartian bronze artefact. Due to different reasons, it can be assumed that this piece was not an import or gift from Urartu. In fact, it shows good comparisons with

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<sup>1</sup> Negahban 1996: 283-284.

<sup>2</sup> For Urartian quivers see Seidl: 2004, 89-91.

<sup>3</sup> Wartke 1990: 59, Fig. 8, c-e.

<sup>4</sup> Santrot 1996: 132-133, Fig. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes, artefacts of presumably Urartian origins are found in places that surely never belonged to this state. This concerns a number of conical helmets from Armenia and the northern Caucasus.

other bracelets from the Talesh Region and was most probably manufactured locally. It is possible that the manufacturing of the bracelet took place during the Iron Age III or IV, maybe at a time when the kingdom of Urartu was not existing anymore. Therefore, this find can not be used to prove the existence of direct relations between Urartu and the Talesh region and it was certainly not a gift from the Urartian king to some high ranked person in Tul-e Talesh. Furthermore, it is not possible to date all the finds from this tomb to the Urartian period.

Apart from the bracelet, a bronze quiver case from Grave 24 at Tul-e Talesh is the only definite Urartian object from Northern Iran. Interestingly enough, both finds fall into the short time range of the Urartian presence around Mount Sabalan. Their occurrence in Talesh might reflect trade relations or even armed conflicts between both regions, but so far, these finds remain isolated. Until now, no imports of Urartian pottery vessels have been found in the numerous excavated burials of the Talesh Region. Swords, daggers, spearheads and arrowheads from Northern Iran differ remarkably from the Urartian material.

It is quite certain that the dolmen tomb at Tul-e Talesh was used over a considerable period of time. The inhumation in the main chamber dates to the Late Bronze Age (15th to 13th centuries BC). Obviously, the tomb was built during that period. Due to the current state of research, it is difficult to identify the material culture of the Talesh Region in the Iron Age I (12th to 11th centuries BC), because most of the finds from the tomb can be attributed to the early first millennium BC. Especially noteworthy is a warrior burial with sword, spearhead, arrowheads and a small golden beaker which belongs to the Iron Age II (10th to 9th centuries BC). A number of iron weapons can be dated to the Iron Age III (8th to 7th centuries BC) while other items such as an openwork bronze pendant and the inscribed bracelet may be from an even later phase. These objects can be connected with the Iron Age III or with the transitional phase towards the Iron Age IV which already represents the Achaemenid era. As mentioned before, the bracelet was found in the upper layers of the tomb and is not directly associated with other burial gifts inside the dolmen. In summary, it is highly likely that the bracelet is one of the latest finds from Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh.

The comparisons between Tul-e Talesh and Marlik are reduced to a few finds which can be connected with the first phase of the necropolis at Marlik, the Late Bronze Age. There is only one object from Marlik which is more or less contemporary to the Urartian period<sup>1</sup>. This bronze fibula which was found in Grave 36 belongs to Pedde's Group D 1.2 and was dated to the 7th to 6th centuries BC<sup>2</sup>. It is most probable that this is an intrusive find, maybe connected with a re-use of the Iron Age I tomb during the

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid misunderstandings it should be emphasized that this is not an Urartian fibula. Examples of this type have been found in the Levant, in Assyria, Babylonia and Western Iran, but never on Urartian territories. See Pedde: 2000: 254, Fig. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Pedde 2000: 253-256.

Iron Age III<sup>1</sup>. The other objects from the tomb date approximately to the 12th century BC<sup>2</sup>. In summary, the idea that Marlik and Urartu were contemporary has to be rejected.

Moreover, it has to be said that there are almost no indications for a direct or intense contact between Urartu and Northern Iran. Obviously, the Urartian presence in the Sabalan Region was just a short intermezzo and did not leave significant traces in the archaeological record. After all, we have to share Salvini's opinion that the Urartians never saw the Caspian Sea<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Haerinck 1988: 65.

<sup>2</sup> Piller 2008: 218-219, 237-239.

<sup>3</sup> Salvini 1995: 102. The tree-covered, transverse ridgelines of the Talesh Mountains clearly represented a difficult task for any foreigner, especially for larger armed forces. This was also impressively attested in Achaemenid times, when the Persians tried to occupy the territory several times but were unable to succeed. The same picture is attested in later times, when Sassanians, Arabs and other invaders failed to conquer this region without problems.

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Fig. 1. a) Dolmen Tomb 1 at Tul-e Talesh, Gilan, in course of excavation; b) Iron Age II warrior burial in the antechamber of Dolmen 1. After Khalatbari 2004a: 36-37, Fig. 5-6.

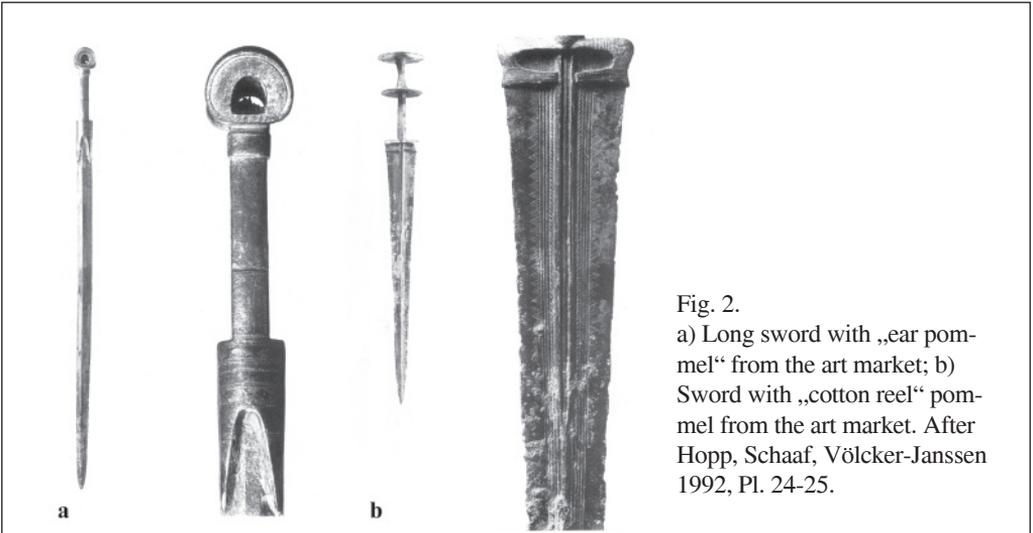


Fig. 2.  
a) Long sword with „ear pommel“ from the art market; b) Sword with „cotton reel“ pommel from the art market. After Hopp, Schaaf, Völcker-Janssen 1992, Pl. 24-25.

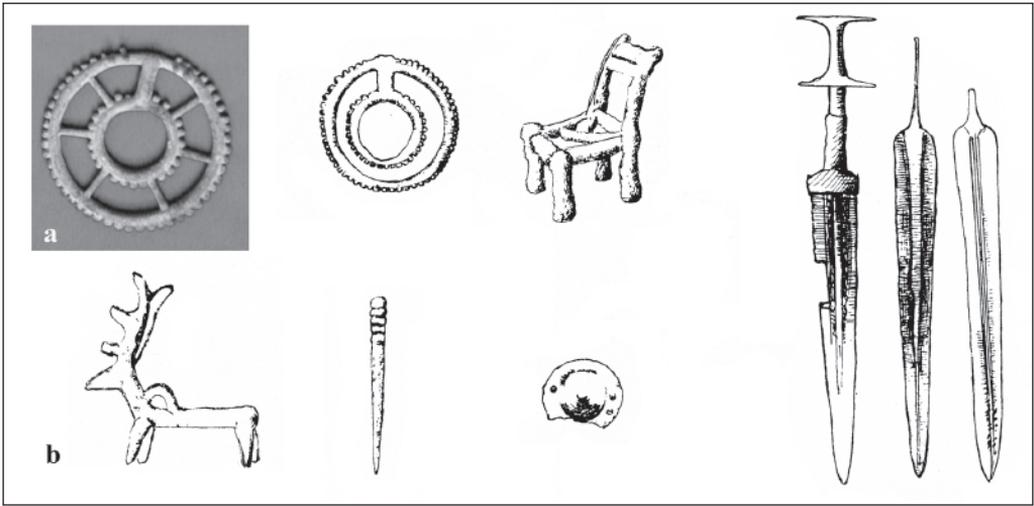


Fig. 3. a) Bronze pendant from Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh, Gilan. After Khalatbari 2004a: 85 Fig. 58; b) Iron Age II/III finds from Grave 14 at Tomadjan, Gilan. After Samadi 1959: 32 Fig. 30, 36 Fig. 34.

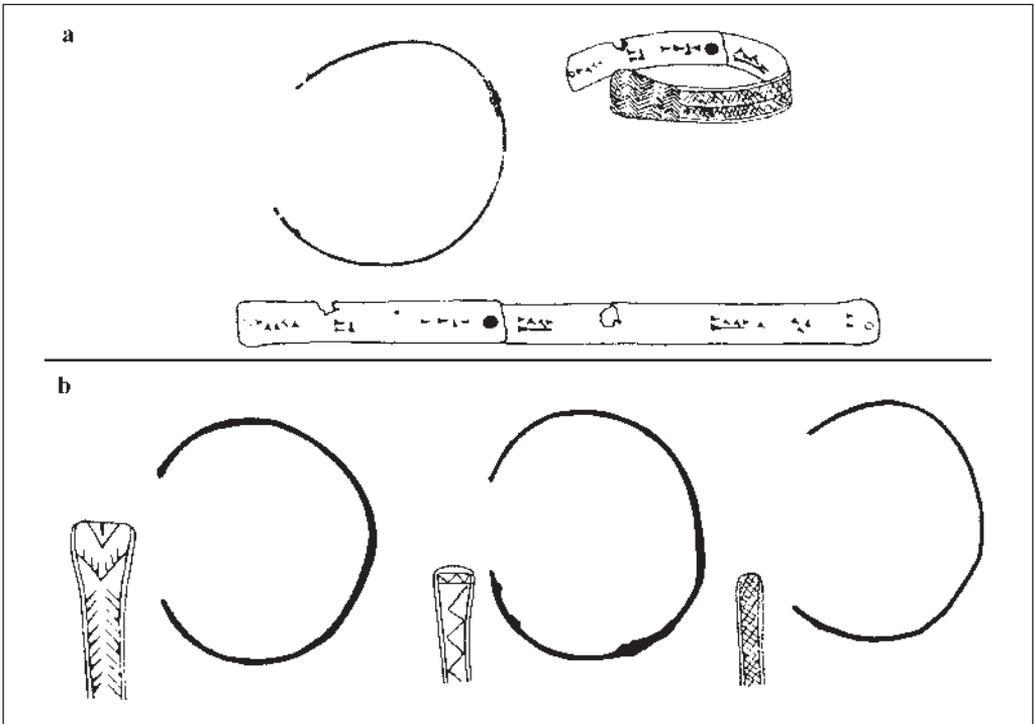


Fig. 4. a) Bronze bracelet with Urartian inscription from Tul-e Talesh, Gilan; b) Bronze bracelets of the same type from other graves at Tul-e Talesh. After Khalatbari 2006: 66-67, Fig. 24-26, 30.

## LIST OF TABLES

### Simon Hmayakyan

- Tab. I/1. A horse-bit from the grave No. 56/1, Lori Berd cemetery (from Santrot 1996: 146).
- Tab. I/2. An scarab-seal from the grave No. 62, Lori Berd cemetery.
- Tab. I/3. The temple of Armavir from the west.
- Tab. II/1. Red-angobed vessel from the grave of the burial of a “young Urartian women”.
- Tab. II/2. Snake-headed bracelet from the cemetery of Nerkin Naver.
- Tab. II/3. A silver cover with the inscription of the king Argishti (Karmir-blur)

### Inesa Karapetyan

- Tab. III/1. The western part of the high podium
- Tab. III/2. Section of the high podium and the southern wall
- Tab. IV/1. The south-eastern counterforce and wall of the temple
- Tab. IV/2. The eastern façade and front yard of the temple
- Tab. V/1-2. Architectural details of the temple
- Tab. VI/1-2. Architectural details of the temple
- Tab. VII/1-5. Urartian earthenware
- Tab. VIII/1-4. A stone vessel and fragments of the “eye” ornament

### Christian Konrad Piller

- Tab. IX. Archaeological sites mentioned in the text on the territories of Eastern Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Gilan and Talesh. Basis: “NASA visible earth” satellite picture; conception by C. Piller; design by M. Gruber.
- Tab. X/1. Stone stelae at Shahryeri, Ardabil. Mount Sabalan is clearly visible in the south. After Azarnoush, Helwing 2005, 217 Fig. 37.
- Tab. X/2. Stone stelae at Shahryeri, Ardabil. Photograph by C. Piller.
- Tab. XI/1. Mountain valley in the Talesh Region near Aq Evlar. Photograph by C. Piller.
- Tab. XI/2. Summer camp in the higher elevations of the Talesh Mountains with traditional “parga” huts. After Kasraian 1996: Fig. 94.

- Tab. XII/1. Necklace with golden disc pendant from the main chamber of Dolmen 1 at Tul-e Talesh, Gilan. Photograph by C. Piller.
- Tab. XII/2. Pottery lamp with plastic decoration from Grave 12 at Maryan, Gilan. Photograph by C. Piller.
- Tab. XIII. a) Grave 24 at Tul-e Talesh, Gilan, in course of excavation. After Khalatbari 2006: 89 Fig. 23; b) Front and back view of the bronze quiver case from Grave 24 at Tul-e Talesh. Photograph by C. Piller.

## **Seda Devedjyan**

- Tab. XIV/1-2. Urartian bronze helmet.
- Tab. XV/1. Bronze discal shields.
- Tab. XV/2. A bronze bowl.
- Tab. XVI/1-2. A silver goblet.
- Tab. XVII/1-2. Buckles of unadorned bronze belt.

## **Husik Melkonyan *et al.***

- Tab. XVIII. General area of excavations in the Vayots Dzor marz of the Republic of Armenia.
- Tab. XIX. Geodesic plans of the new-found fortresses.
- Tab. XX/1. General view of the fortress Getap I.
- Tab. XX/2. The northern wall of the fortress.
- Tab. XXI/1. The rocky surfaces of the hill evened to lay the walls in a regular line.
- Tab. XXI/2. The central hall of the fortress.
- Tab. XXII/1. The remains of the mud-brick walls.
- Tab. XXII/2. A cellar in the northern slope of the hill.
- Tab. XXIII. A medieval burial (No. 3) in the upper horizon of the central hall.
- Tab. XXIV. Urartian vessels with potter's mark.
- Tab. XXV. Urartian vessels with potter's mark.
- Tab. XXVI. Urartian lampions.
- Tab. XXVII. Urartian bowls.
- Tab. XXVIII. Medieval artifacts.





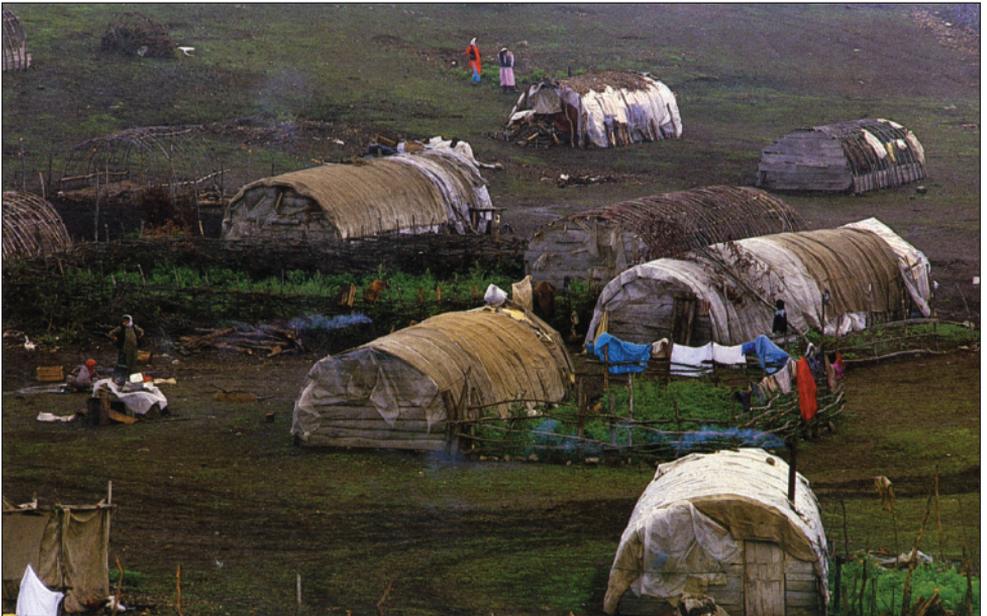
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