

# Halimejan Cemetery Sites, Alborz Mountains, North Iran

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## Introduction

After the retirement of Professor Namio Egami, who directed a series of archaeological excavations in West Asia as the director of the Tokyo University of Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition to West Asia, in 1965, the expedition team spent a decade publishing the excavation results. After publishing a total of 15 excavation volumes in 1975, the team reorganized the research design under the direction of Professor Shinji Fukai, with two major objectives: one was to continue research into the early farming village sites in northern Mesopotamia, mostly in Iraq, and the second was art historian-related, aiming toward studying the east-west cultural exchange during the ancient Silk Road period. Thus, the expedition team was titled the Tokyo University Iran-Iraq Scientific Research Team. Reflecting the interest of Professor Fukai, the expedition listed Iran first in this title. This renewed expedition team spent two seasons in Iran and Iraq, in 1976 and 1978. The archaeological sites investigated in Iran as well as historical monuments such as Taq-i Bustan were included in art-historical studies (Fukai et al. 1985).

Archaeological research in Iran was devoted to ancient cemetery sites in the Gilan Province, whose research potential was demonstrated by the 1960-1964 excavations (see Chapter for Dailaman sites). The region chosen for the second stage of the excavations at this time was the Halimejan District, which is situated approximately 25 km west of the Dailaman Village (Fig. 1). It comprises a plateau hill that was developed along the right bank of the Sefid Rud River, which is incised by numerous gullies and wadis. The ongoing destruction of archaeological sites due to treasure hunting, oil pipe line management, and road constructions was considered when choosing the area for archaeological investigations. Two major cemetery complexes were excavated as follows.

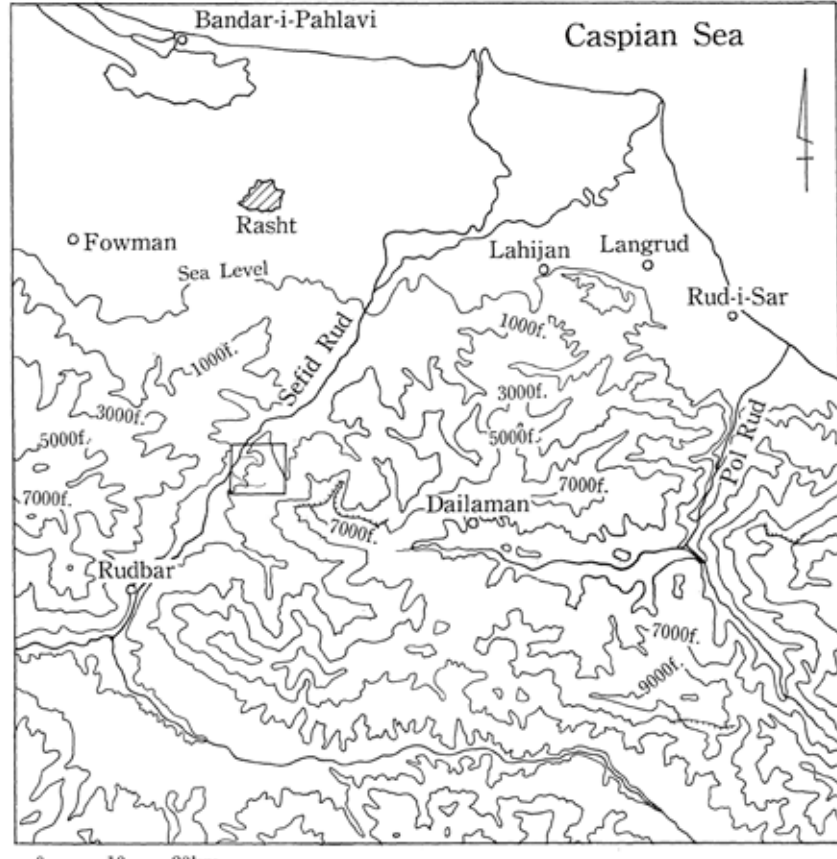


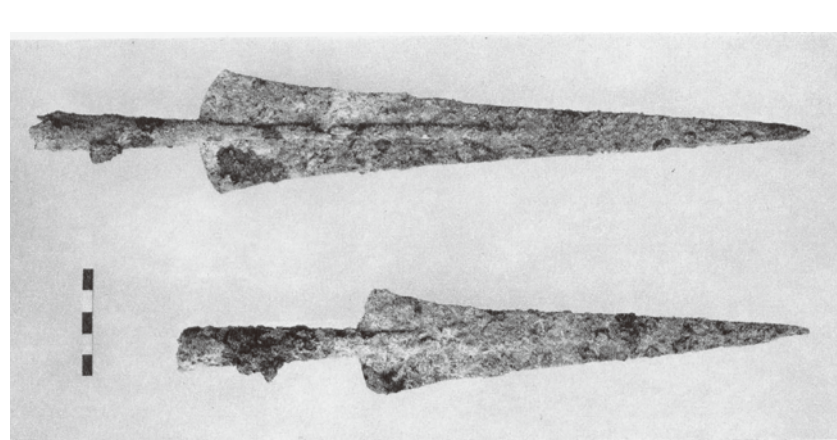
Fig. 1 Map showing the location of the Halimejan District in Northeast Iran.

## Shahpir (1976)

The field investigations in the 1976 season, conducted between June 10 and July 31, were devoted to a site reconnaissance survey and the excavations of any selected spots. The survey identified more than ten ancient cemetery complexes in the region, all of which hinted at heavy looting. Among these, the site of Shahpir was chosen for excavation in this season (Fig. 2). Although two areas were excavated, Area I (52 square meters) and Area II (38 square meters), ancient tombs were discovered in Area II only. At least four tombs were recovered, all of which showed a shaft-tomb structure with a horizontal passage and chamber. The bodies were laid in an extended way, together with a number of funerary objects including metal spearheads and swords, pottery vessels, bone objects, and metal ornaments (Fig. 3). A preliminary interpretation of these tombs indicated that they were from the Iron Age (Hori 1981).



Fig. 2 Distant view of the Shahpir site.



## Lame Zamin (1978)

This cemetery site was also discovered in the 1976 season, and is located about 3 km southwest from Sharpir. It is situated on the left bank of the Shahrān Valley, which is a tributary that joins the right bank of the Sefid Rud River. Two areas, Areas I and II, were selected for excavation, because of the destruction that had been caused by road construction. Although Area I was found to have been almost fully looted by local treasure hunters, Area II yielded 12 undisturbed tombs, all belonging to the Iron Age (Figs. 4 and 5). Careful study revealed a series of distinct differences between the burial practices for adults and children. The six adult burials showed a shaft tomb structure with a horizontal chamber/passage, while the six child burials were all simple pit burials. Furthermore, the associated burial goods also showed notable differences among the age grades and genders. Specific types of pottery vessels and different funerary goods were offered, depending on the age and gender of the dead. For instance, spindle whorls for weaving were found only in the female burials, and stone beads and bone toy objects were solely found in the child burials. These observations show the significance of the excavations at Halimejan in understanding the social complexity of the Iron Age society of northeast Iran.\*

\*The text is after Nishiaki 2020.

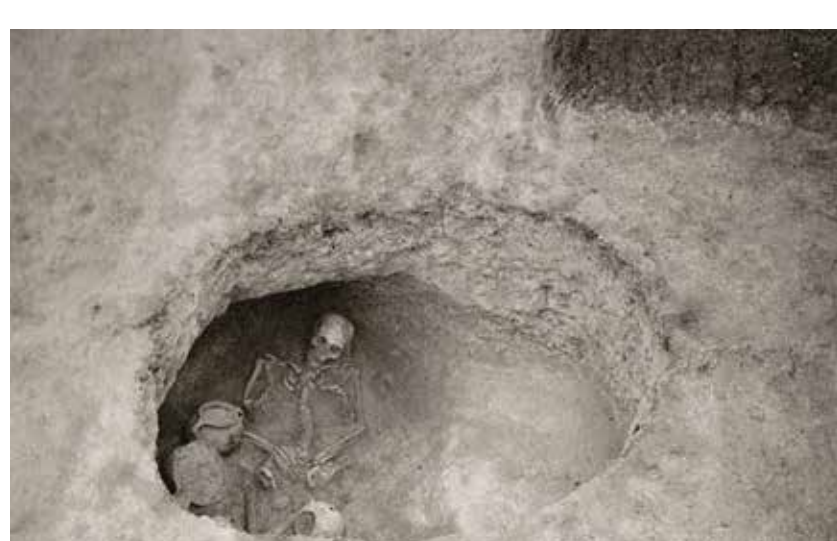


Fig. 4 Excavations of Tomb 103 at Lame Zamin (Fukai and Matsutani 1982).



Fig. 5 Pottery excavated from Tomb 103 at Lame Zamin (Fukai and Matsutani 1982).

## Further reading

Fukai, S. and T. Matsutani, T. (1977) Preliminary Report of Survey and Soundings at Halimehjan, 1976. *Orient* 13: 41-52.  
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