



Expansion of Godin III Pottery on the Eastern Boundaries of the Qorveh Plain

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ABSTRACT

The archaeology of the prehistoric period in the Kurdistan region of western Iran remains poorly understood. Among the understudied prehistoric periods in this region, the Bronze Age—particularly the Middle and Late Bronze Age—has received little archaeological attention. Geographically, Kurdistan lies between two major archaeological research zones: the Urmia Lake basin to the north and central Zagros to the south. During the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the Urmia Lake basin was dominated by cultures such as Khabur or Urmia Ware, while the central Zagros region, south of Kurdistan, was influenced by distinct traditions, including Godin III. In other words, the northern and southern areas of Kurdistan were shaped by two different cultural traditions during this period. However, the cultural landscape of Bronze Age Kurdistan itself remains unclear. A recent archaeological survey in the Qorveh Plain, eastern Kurdistan, identified painted Godin III pottery on the surface of Tepe Dinar in Vey Nesar. This discovery marks a significant extension of the Godin III cultural zone beyond its core in central Zagros, indicating that its influence was not confined to that region but extended further into western Iran. The widespread distribution of Godin III traditions, from Khuzestan in the south to Kurdistan in the north, suggests broader cultural interactions than previously recognized. Furthermore, these findings highlight that the scarcity of Middle and Late Bronze Age sites identified in Kurdistan to date is likely due to the application of inappropriate archaeological survey methods. Given its geographical position, the Kurdistan region likely had a comparable potential for the development of Middle and Late Bronze Age settlements as central Zagros and the Urmia Lake basin.

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Introduction

As previously noted, the Kurdistan region is situated between the central Zagros zone and the Urmia Lake zone in western Iran. Archaeological excavations at sites such as Godin in central Zagros and Hasanlu in northwestern Iran have significantly contributed to clarifying the cultural sequence of these areas from the prehistoric period to the Islamic era. However, multi-period archaeological sites like Hasanlu and Godin have yet to be excavated in the Kurdistan region, leaving its cultural sequence largely unclear.

In this context, sites such as Tepe Qale Naneh in Marivan (Binandeh & Silvana Di Paolo, 2023) and Tepe Qeshlagh in the Bijar area (Motarjem & Sharifi, 2015) represent the two main archaeological sites in Kurdistan, with long cultural sequences spanning from prehistory to the Islamic era. In addition to excavations at these sites, extensive archaeological surveys across different parts of Kurdistan have led to the identification of numerous sites, particularly those dating to the prehistoric and Chalcolithic periods (Saedmucheshi *et al.*, 2011). Despite these efforts, research on the Bronze Age, especially the Middle and Late Bronze periods in Kurdistan, remains limited. Consequently, our understanding of Bronze Age archaeology in the region is significantly less developed compared to that of the Chalcolithic period.

Regarding Bronze Age archaeological research in Kurdistan, numerous Early Bronze Age (Godin IV) sites characterized by Kura-Araxes black-gray ceramics have been identified in the eastern regions of Kurdistan Province, including Deh Golan, Bijar, and the Oorveh area (Rajabioun & Shirazi, 2015). In contrast, during the preceding period (Godin V/Godin VI), only a few Late Uruk sites have been identified in areas such as Marivan in Kurdistan (Zamani Dadaneh *et al.*, 2019; Saedmucheshi *et al.*, 2012). The number of sites increased during the Early Bronze Age, reflecting a broader cultural expansion. While the Kura-Araxes black-gray ceramic tradition dominated the vast regions of western and northwestern Iran during the Early Bronze Age, a significant cultural shift occurred in the Middle and Late Bronze periods.

During these later phases, northwestern Iran came under the influence of cultures such as Khabur and Urmia Ware (Edwards, 1986), while central Zagros was dominated by a distinct cultural tradition known as Godin III

(Henrickson, 1986, 1987a). Recent findings from the surface of Tepe Dinar in Vey Nesar further clarify that the eastern region of Kurdistan Province in western Iran was also part of the broader Godin III cultural sphere.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is primarily based on fieldwork and surface surveys of the site. Given the considerable size of Tepe Dinar in Vey Nesar, located in the Qorveh Plain, the site naturally attracted the attention of archaeologists and was frequently revisited by the authors. During our initial visit, we identified Chalcolithic and Historic-Islamic ceramics on the surface. It is worth noting that such ceramics had previously been observed by other archaeologists who visited the site. However, during subsequent visits, we discovered painted Godin III ceramics on the surface for the first time. This discovery prompted a comparative analysis with neighboring sites and regions, particularly Tepe Godin in eastern central Zagros, to better understand the cultural affiliations of Tepe Dinar.

Discussion

Godin III pottery of Tepe Dinar of Vey Nesar

Tepe Dinar of Vey Nesar is located approximately 25 km east of Qorveh city, in the eastern part of Kurdistan Province (Figs. 1, 2). The site spans more than 3 hectares and contains 15 meters of archaeological deposits. However, parts of the site have been leveled and damaged due to recent human activities, particularly agricultural practices (Figs. 3, 4).

The site was first surveyed by archaeologists from the Kurdistan Province Office of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts (Azizi, 2000). Approximately two decades later, the site was revisited by the authors, leading to the discovery of Godin III pottery for the first time.

Regarding the presence of Godin III pottery in Kurdistan Province, there is limited and somewhat ambiguous information from Swiny's 1975 survey in the Bijar area. Swiny identified only a single Godin III sherd on the surface of a site labeled T83 (Swiny, 1975: 87). Additionally, during the archaeological excavations at Tepe Qeshlagh, a short stratigraphic layer associated with the Godin III tradition was documented (Motarjem & Sharifi, 2014). The recently discovered Godin III pottery at Tepe Dinar of

Vey Nesar represents the most comprehensive assemblage of this tradition ever found in Kurdistan Province, surpassing both the isolated find from Swiny’s survey (T83) and the limited Godin III stratum at Tepe Qeshlagh (Fig. 5).

Preliminary analysis suggests that the Godin III pottery from Tepe Dinar of Vey Nesar belongs specifically to the Godin III:2 phase, dating to approximately 1900–1600 B.C. (Henrickson, 2011).

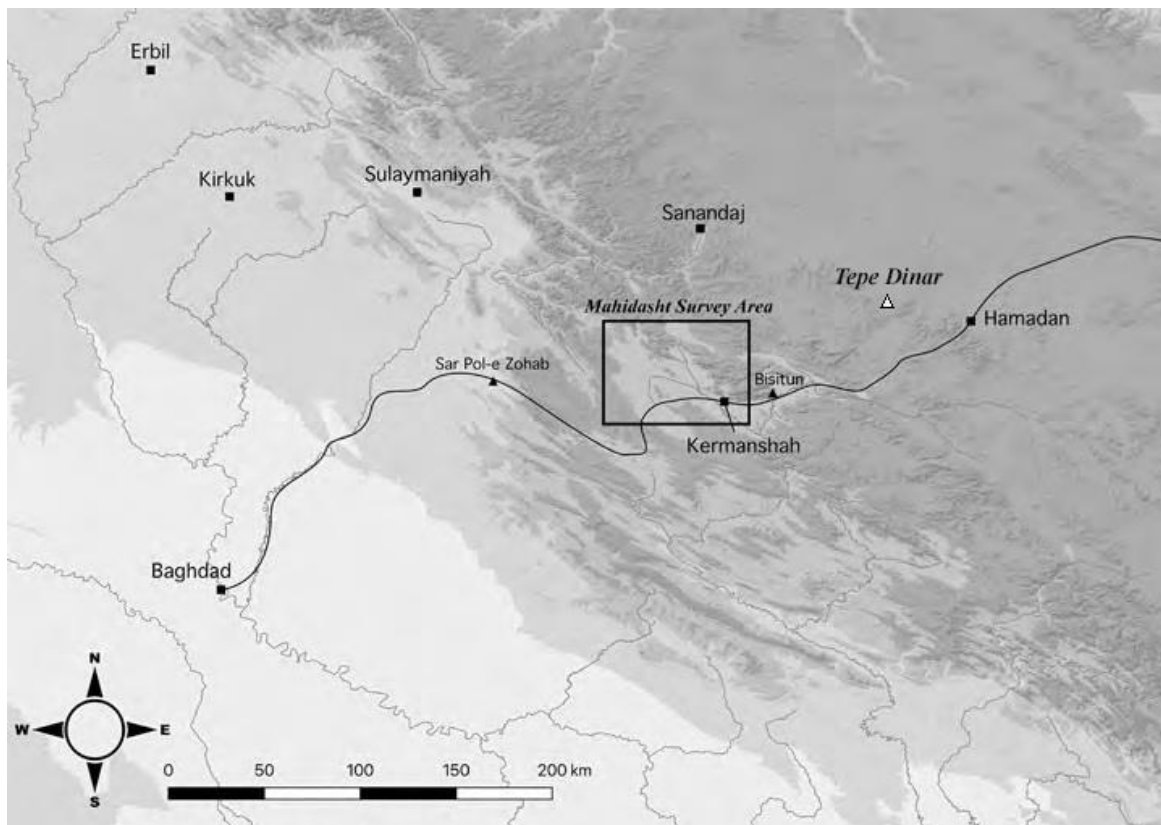


Figure 1: Location of Tepe Dinar in relation to the east-west communication highway and Mahidasht archaeological area (Renette et al., 2021: 4).

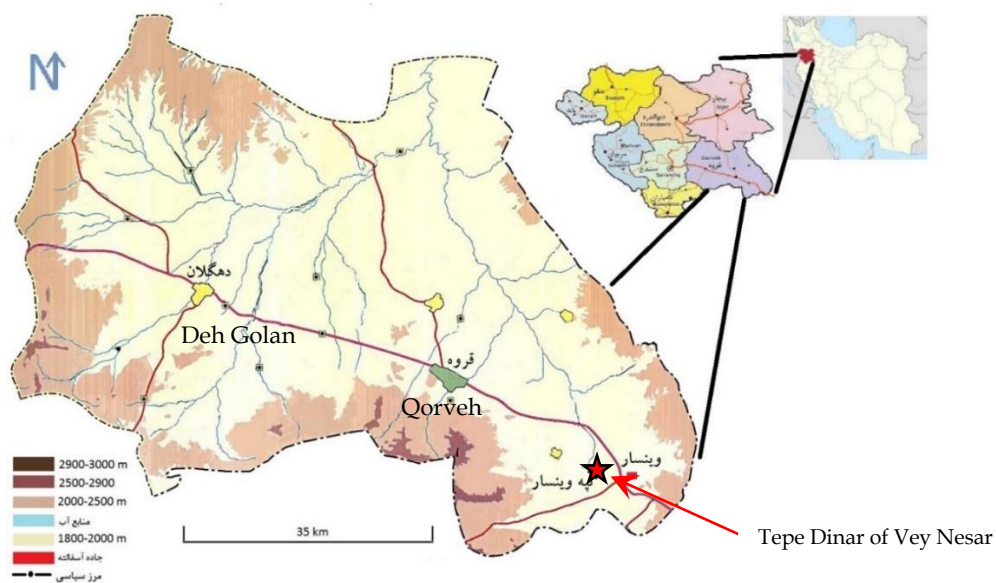


Figure 2: Geographical location of Tepe Dinar of Vey Nesar on the Kurdistan province map (Authors, 2022).



Figure 3: Northern view of Tepe Dinar (Authors, 2022).



Figure 4: Southern view of Tepe Dinar (Authors, 2022).

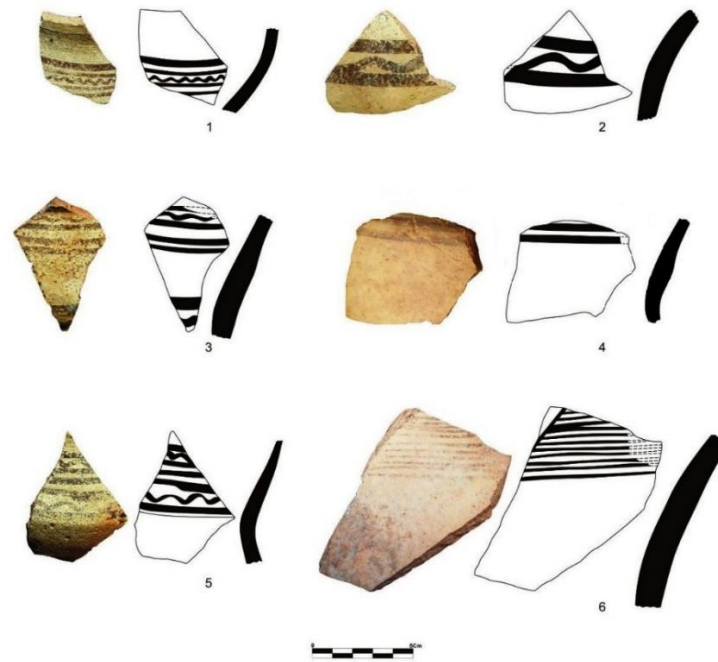


Figure 5: Godin III pottery from Tepe Dinar (Authors, 2022).

Conclusion

This research yields two main findings regarding the Bronze Age archaeology of eastern Kurdistan Province, particularly the Middle and Late Bronze periods. First, it confirms that the eastern part of Kurdistan during the Middle and Late Bronze Age was influenced by central Zagros cultures, such as the Godin III tradition, rather than by northwestern traditions like Khabur or Urmia Ware. This suggests that the Godin III cultural sphere was not confined to central Zagros but extended northward into Kurdistan. The recent discovery of Godin III pottery in the Qorveh Plain, eastern Kurdistan, indicates that the geographical extent of this tradition stretched from Khuzestan in the south to Kurdistan in the north. The second finding relates to archaeological survey methodologies. Although Tepe Dinar had been surveyed multiple times prior to this study, Godin III pottery had not been identified until our recent investigation. This case is not an isolated example – misidentification of surface ceramics, particularly Bronze Age pottery, has been a recurring issue in many archaeological surveys. As a result, previous survey reports have suggested that Kurdistan has a lower number of Middle and Late Bronze Age sites compared to the Urmia Lake basin or central Zagros. However, our findings at Tepe Dinar challenge this assumption, indicating that many Bronze Age sites in Kurdistan have been

overlooked or misclassified in past surveys. It is evident that with more systematic and refined survey methodologies, additional Middle and Late Bronze Age sites will be identified in Kurdistan. The region possesses the same potential as northwestern Iran and central Zagros in terms of prehistoric settlement formation, particularly regarding Bronze Age sites.

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