

Human remains from the catacombs of Samen, Iran, 2007–2011

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The troglodytic complex of Samen is located 100km south of Hamadan and 15km south of Malayer (34°12'34.62"N, 48°42'12.96"E, 1869 masl) (**Figure 1**). The complex was recovered accidentally during development activities in 2005 and was explored further during four seasons of archaeological investigations in 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011.



Figure 1. The location of Samen, Hamadan, Iran.

Located under an urban area, the Samen complex is carved in granite bedrock at a depth of 2–8m and consists of 8 underground workshops. More than 50 chambers of various dimensions were identified, being interconnected by corridors and thresholds (**Figures 2–4**).



Figure 2. The location of entrances to Workshops 1 and 5.

Within two workshops (1 and 5), human skeletal remains were recovered as *in situ* burials, being clusters of skeletons deposited at the corners of halls and chambers. Burials were discovered after clearance and excavation in eight chambers. Anthropological recording and documentation of the recovered skeletal remains was undertaken by Farzad Fooruzanfar (Hemati Azandaryani 2013).

In total, the remains of at least 60 individuals were recovered including 8 in primary contexts and the rest in secondary clusters (MNI calculated after Mays 2010: 26). As the MNI values for each cluster were relatively low, a tentative identification of individual skeletons was done and their sex was assessed using the pelvis and skull (Mays 2010, see Tague 1995). Below is a brief summary of the human remains retrieved from the individual chambers.

Workshop 1a. Hall 102 contained the remains of 5 individuals, including one middle aged female, one young female, young adult, and two children with developing permanent teeth (Figure 5). Hall 101 contained a cluster of bones belonging to 9 individuals with 3 males, 4 females, 1 young adult, and 1 child (Figure 6). Room 102 contained a cluster with the commingled bones of 4 individuals with two relatively intact skulls. All skeletal elements were clustered at the corner of the chamber and covered with alluvium. There were also two disturbed primary burials and perhaps a third burial of a child between them (Figure 7). Hall 103 contained a deposition of skeletal remains at the eastern corner of the hall which included an infant, a female, and an adult in his twenties, a middle aged female in her thirties, and a short robust male in his thirties (Figure 8). In Hall 104 human bones were scattered on the floor.

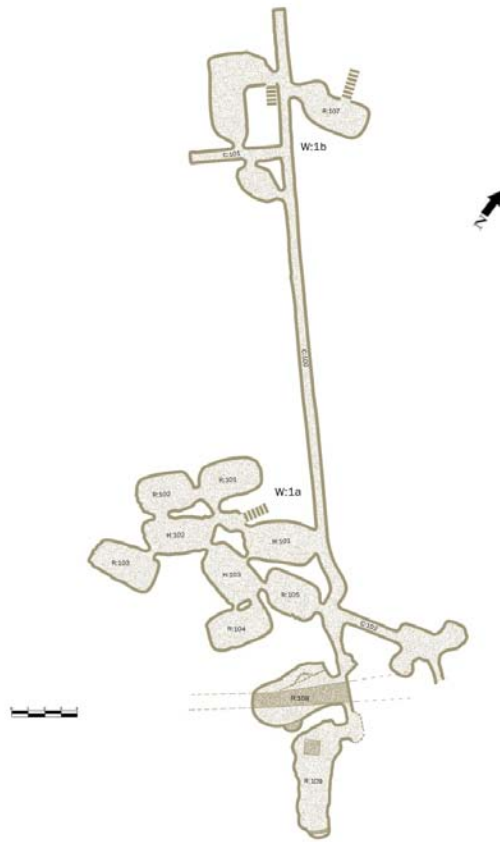


Figure 3. The plan of Workshop 1.

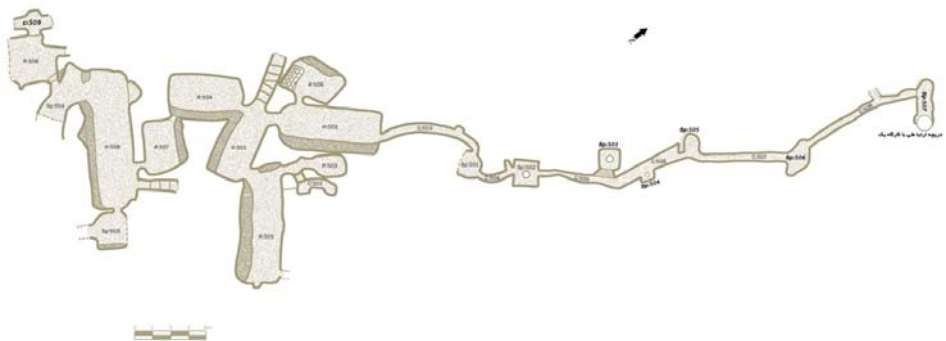


Figure 4. The plan of Workshop 5.

There were remains of 6 people including a child, an old woman, a young adult, a middle age, a young adult, and an adolescent. Hall 105 contained 6 individuals recovered from a heap across the chamber (Figure 9).



Figure 5. A mass burial in Hall 102, Workshop 1a.

Workshop 1b. Hall 107 contained 13 individuals including 6 males, 4 females, and 3 children heaped in with some skeletal remains in clusters and some scattered (Figure 10).

Workshop 5. Hall 501 contained one primary burial on the back, at the corner of the chamber, the skull was relocated. Hall 502 contained the remains of two individuals buried one atop the other, recovered from the middle of the hall. The lower body was relatively intact. The second body, deposited over the previous lower body burial, was disturbed (Figure 11).

In total among all the studied individuals from the various workshops at Samen there were 16 males, 26 females, 1 newborn child, 14 subadults, and 3 unidentified (Hemati Azandaryani 2013). Such concentration of burials is quite exceptional. Several samples were taken for C^{14} dating, however, the results have not been published yet. The burial complex at Samen can be compared to such archaeological sites as Valiran, Damavand (Nemati & Sadraei 2012), Gelalak Shushtar (Rahbar 1997, 1999), the artisan city of Susa (De Mecquenem 1943), and Saleh Davood (Rahbar 2006, 2007) all of which generally date to the Parthian period.



Figure 6. Human remains of Hall 101, Workshop 1a.

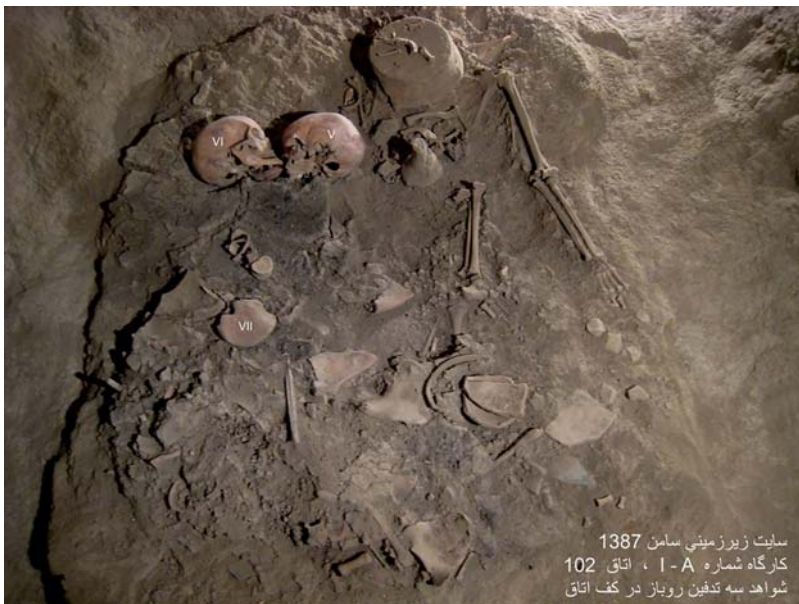


Figure 7. Human remains of Room 102, Workshop 1a.



Figure 8. Human remains of Hall 103, Workshop 1a.



Figure 9. Human remains of Room 105, Workshop 1a.



Figure 10. Human remains of Room 107, Workshop 1b.



Figure 11. The *in situ* burial in Room 502, Workshop 5.

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