

Human remains from Sanandaj–Zagros, Iran, 2008

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During construction of a road in Sanandaj, the capital city of the Kurdistan province in Iran, a cemetery was found on a slope of the Abidar mountains west of the Zagros Town district (35°17'15''N, 46°58'59''E, 1628masl). A rescue operation was conducted in November 2008 by the staff of the Sanandaj Regional Museum under the direction of Faiq Tawhidi. In total, 28 graves were unearthed and three of them were cut out of the surrounding soil, covered by Paraloid B, and subsequently displayed in the museum. Most bodies at the cemetery were laid on their side with flexed legs and only in three selected burials (A6, A10 and A12), with very rich grave goods, were the bodies placed in a supine position (**Figure 1**). Based on artifacts that accompanied the skeletons, the cemetery was dated to the Iron Age II (c. 1200–800 BCE in regional chronology), but the three distinguished burials were found to date later, from the 8th–6th century BCE (Amelirad et al. 2012).

The three burials displayed in the museum were studied by Sołtysiak in March 2018. It was possible to take only measurements of a few exposed bones, a situation that heavily compromised the output of the skeletal analysis. Therefore, the main aim was to assess the minimum number of individuals (MNI), sex, age-at-death, and burial pattern using standard osteological methods (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994).

Burial A10 included two skeletons, positioned one on top of the other. The lower one (A) was partially exposed to reveal some areas of cranium and perhaps the humerus that appeared to have been dislocated *post mortem*. The cranium belonged to an adult individual, with significantly obliterated sutures, and no reliable sex assessment was possible (glabella 2, supraorbital margins 3). The upper skeleton (B) belonged most likely to a female (vertical head diameter of left humerus 40.6mm), although cranial morphology was ambiguous and the left radius was relatively long (248mm). However, the total length of the skeleton was c. 150cm, a value perhaps slightly underestimated due to some post-mortem dislocation of cranium that was placed higher than remaining part of the skeleton.



Figure 1. Burials from Sanandaj-Zagros, from top to bottom: A10, A6, A12.

Burial A6 contained two skeletons, in a similar position as A10. The lower one (A) was articulated and the upper (B) carefully arranged over the lower limbs of the lower one, with the cranium of B between the knees of A, the long bones of B carefully arranged along the legs of A, the mandible of B above the feet of A, and the other bones of B placed between the long bones of this individual. Skeleton A belonged to a young male, as suggested by the morphology of the left pubic symphysis, and its total length was c. 170cm. Sex and age-at-death of individual B were more difficult to assess. The femoral midshaft was gracile (antero-posterior diameter 25.8mm, medio-lateral diameter 25.6mm), but the left humerus was relatively long (314mm). However, it was more likely female than male. Tooth attrition was quite advanced, so the skeleton belonged likely to a mature individual.

In burial A12 one skeleton (A) was nearly complete, with a length of c. 120cm from the top of the cranium to the distal ends of the femora. The lower parts of the legs were heavily distorted. Bones were neither very robust nor very gracile (right radius, maximum diameter of the proximal end 20.3; subtrochanteric diameters of the femur, anter-posterior 22.7, medio-lateral 33.6) and as a result sex could not be assessed. Above the pelvis of this individual a few elements from two other skeletons were found: a fragment of the cranial vault of an adult individual (B) and three premolars of a 6–10 year-old child (C) (cf. AlQahtani et al. 2010). Most likely they were removed from other graves at the cemetery. However, it is likely that there may have been a second original body present, as between the femora of individual A some eroded, but likely articulated ribs were seen.

Therefore, it is likely that all three distinguished graves from the cemetery at Sanandaj–Zagros were double graves, but arranged in different ways. All of them belonged to adult individuals who represented the elite of the local community, as suggested by the rich grave goods.

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