

Human remains from Jezlan Dasht, Iran, 2013

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The cemetery of Jezlan Dasht (known also as Jeyran Tepe) is located on the upper terrace of the Qizil Üzan river, near the village of Jezlan Dasht in Zanjan province (37°00'30"N, 48°47'36"E, 439masl). Identified during a survey conducted in 2007 by Erzollahullah Najafi, this site was excavated in March 2011 and March-April 2013 under the supervision of Behnam Ghanbari. Prior to excavations, it was almost completely destroyed by more than 200 holes dug by illegal treasure-hunters and was also affected by the development of an olive tree plantation located to the east and south of the site (**Figure 1**).

Four small trenches were explored in the western part of the cemetery that was less affected by modern looting activities. In the largest trench, Trench I (6.5×5.2m),



Figure 1. Satellite view of the cemetery. Map data: Google, GeoEye.



Figure 2. Trench I Grave 2. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.



Figure 3. Trench I Grave 3. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.



Figure 4. Trench III Grave 4. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.



Figure 5. Trench IV Grave 5. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.

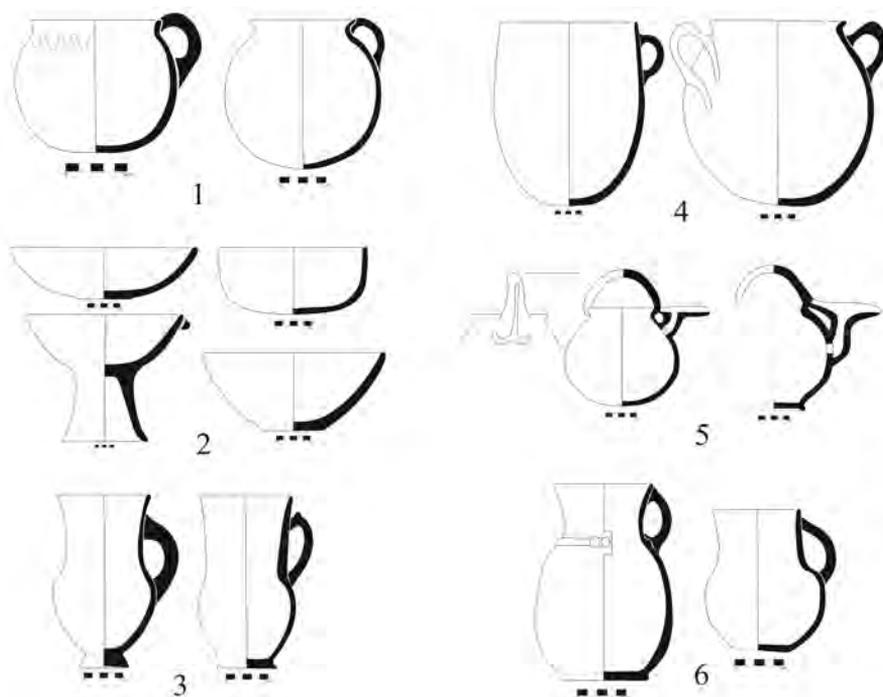


Figure 6. Pottery from Jezlan Dasht. Drawing by Behnam Ghanbari.

three oval pit graves were found. One of them (Grave 1) was completely covered by stones, while two others had only their southern parts covered (Figures 2 and 3). The skeletal remains of one individual, likely belonging to a subadult based on their dimensions, were found in Grave 1. In Trench III (3×2m), three burials were explored, including a double burial (Grave 4) with two chambers separated by a stone wall (Figure 4). This grave was also covered by stones. A very similar double burial was also present in Trench IV (2.5×2.5m) (Figure 5). Both double burials contained the remains of one adult and one subadult individual. All of the identified skeletons at the cemetery were oriented along a SE-NW axis and all graves contained between three and eight pottery vessels (Figures 6 and 7), usually gathered near the head or the feet of the body. Some metal personal ornaments were also present in all excavated graves (Figure 8).

Based on pottery, the graves have been dated to the Iron Age II, with some artifacts also suggesting Iron Age III (c. 1050-800 and 800-550 BCE, respectively; Danti 2013). One radiocarbon date based on dentin collagen from the male individual (Grave 3), however, provided a date at the transition from the Iron Age I to the Iron Age II (Poz-112420, 1127-931 cal. BC, 95.4% probability).



Figure 7. Pottery from Jezlan Dasht. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.



Figure 8. Metal objects from Jezlan Dasht. Photograph by Behnam Ghanbari.



Figure 9. Trench I Grave 2. The line of beads in the soil near the mandible. Photograph by Arkadiusz Sołtysiak.

The human remains from Jezlan Dasht were studied in March 2018 in the facilities of the Zanjan Saltmen Museum using the standardized protocols presented in Buikstra & Ubelaker (1994) with some modifications (see Sołtysiak et al. 2019). In total, the remains of nine individuals were identified (Table 1), including six adults of both sexes, and three subadults having ages-at-death between 10 and 18 years. No younger children were represented in this collection, which is quite common at Iron Age cemeteries in Iran (e.g., Sołtysiak et al. 2017; Sołtysiak et al. 2018; Hosseinzadeh et al. 2018).

Usually the skeletons were strongly eroded, fragmented, and incomplete, with some evidence of various taphonomic agents, such as root etching and insect tun-



Figure 10. Trench III Grave 4. Hypertrophy of the deltoid attachment at the left clavicle. Scale bar 1cm. Photograph by Arkadiusz Sołtysiak.

neling, especially in Test Trench 6. In the case of two individuals, the skulls were unearched with large quantities of surrounding soil and some beads were still present next to the mandible: white ones with the skeleton from Trench I Grave 3 and multi-coloured with the skeleton from Trench I Grave 2 (Figure 9).

Due to very poor state of preservation, mainly only teeth were available for bioarchaeological analyses. The frequency of dental caries was rather high (16.3%, 20 per 123 teeth) and also antemortem tooth loss (AMTL) was present in all four adult individuals with at least partially preserved alveoli. Such prevalence of dental caries was much higher than in the agricultural populations in north-eastern Syria (Sołtysiak 2014), suggesting that the local population had regular access to food items rich in fermentable sugars. Only a few other pathological conditions were recorded on the bones, including advanced degenerative joint disease in the individual from Trench IV Grave 2 and hypertrophy of the deltoid origin point at the left clavicle in the individual from Trench III Grave 4 (Figure 10).

Table 1. Basic characteristics of human remains from Jezlan Dasht.

Grave	Sex	Age-at-death	Caries	AMTL	Comments
Tr. I G-2	F*	mature	5/27	2/31	very fragmented and incomplete
Tr. I G-3	F	mature	0/7	2/4	very fragmented and incomplete
Tr. III G-4	–	12			very fragmented and incomplete
Tr. III G-4	?	mature	1/3		a few strongly eroded elements
Tr. IV G-1	–	10-11			very fragmented and incomplete
Tr. IV G-2	F	mature	0/13		very fragmented and incomplete
G-3	M*	adult	7/30	2/32	skull and cervical vertebrae + right leg (?)
T.T.6	?	adult	5/21	2/23	strongly eroded skull
T.T.6	?	15-18	2/22		a few strongly eroded elements

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