

Report of the first season of archaeological excavation on Kasegaran II site, Piranshahr, northwest of Iran

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Abstract: Piranshahr city is located in a mountainous region with plains in between the middle of the mountains. It is located in the northwestern part of Iran in terms of geographical location. In the field survey of this city, ancient sites from different cultural periods were discovered and studied. Some of these sites provided evidence of permanent and temporary settlements from the Parthian and Sassanid periods. In this research, the authors report results of the first season of excavation at Kasegaran II site. This research, which relies on the results of archaeological excavations and library studies, seeks to answer the following questions: 1- What is the cultural sequence in Kasegaran II hill? 2- Which cultural period represents the most important settlement in Kasegaran II hill? The results of studies showed that the area related to the Parthian period had a temporary establishment. Therefore, no evidence of architecture and permanent residence in this area has been identified.

Rezumat: Orașul Piranshahr este situat într-o regiune muntoasă cu câmpii în interiorul munților, în partea de nord-vest a Iranului. În cadrul cercetărilor de teren din jurul acestui oraș, au fost descoperite și investigate situri arheologice, din diferite perioade culturale. În unele dintre aceste situri există dovezi ale unor așezări permanente sau temporare din perioadele parților și sasanizilor. În acest studiu, autorii prezintă rezultatele obținute în urma săpăturilor din primul sezon din sitului Kasegaran II. Cercetarea, care se bazează pe rezultatele săpăturilor arheologice și studiul bibliografic, încearcă să răspundă la următoarele întrebări: 1- Care este succesiunea culturală în situl Kasegaran II? 2- Care perioadă culturală reprezintă cea mai importantă locuire în situl Kasegaran II? Rezultatele studiilor au arătat că zona locuită în perioadă parț a fost doar o locuire temporară. Astfel, nu s-a identificat nicio dovadă arhitecturală sau ale vreunei locuiri permanente în această zonă.

Keywords: Northwestern Iran, Kasegaran II, Parthian, temporary establishment.

Cuvinte cheie: nord-vestul Iranului, Kasegaran II, Parți, locuire permanentă.

◆ Introduction

Northwest Iran, better known as Azerbaijan in historical sources, has an important place in Iranian archaeological studies. Evidence from different cultural periods has been identified and excavated in this geographical area so far. However, the cultural context of this region in the Parthian period¹ is less known than other periods, and information of this period is generally based on the results of the excavations in areas such as Qal'eh Zohak in Hashtrud

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¹ The Parthian period began from 247 BC to 224 AD in the history of Iran.

(W. Kleiss 1973), Jar burials in Germi (S. Kambakhshfard 1998), Bakhtak Castle in Malekan (A. Sadraei 2001), Mahneshan Castle in Zanzan (A. Khosrozadeh, A. Aali 2010), Kohne Pasgah (B. Aqalari, M. Deh Pahlaven 2011), Barkamran Tepe (E. Bodaqi *et alii* 2021), Qezel Qayah Hill in Meshgin Shahr (R. Rezalu 2018), and Tapeh Shotorban (F. Rahimi 2017).

The region of northwestern Iran in the Parthian period was a part of the semi-autonomous state of Atropates (Rawlinson 1840). Mede Atropaten is a name of land taken its name of General Atropats (F.M. Jones 1928, p. 303). The members of this dynasty continued their hereditary state over Azerbaijan until the beginning of the first century AD (R. Rais Niya 2007, p. 342). But after the death of Mehrdad II, Tigranes II, after conquering all of northern Mesopotamia, also subdued Atropates (M. Diakonoff 1965, p. 59). The Parthians added the territory of Armenia to their territory after the establishment of internal order and the consolidation of their government during the reign of Mehrdad II (A.D.H. Bivar 2004, p. 142). This action was the beginning of continuous conflicts between Iran and Rome over the annexation of Armenia until this land was then passed 'hand to hand' between Iran and Rome (P. Hossein Talaee, M. Maleki 2017, p. 864). In general, the northwestern region of Iran acted as a link between the territories of Armenia, east of Anatolia, and northern Iraq. Therefore, it is necessary to do coherent archaeological studies related to this period. Various sites of this period were identified in the study of a damming project of Kani Sib in 2017, some of which belong to the Parthian period. Kasegaran II was excavated as a single cultural period site, and its results are important to understand the settlement status of the northwestern region of Iran in the Parthian period. Due to the lack of cultural data on the Parthian period in northwestern Iran (E. Haerinck 1997, p. 139), undoubtedly, these discoveries from the newly excavated sites will play an important role in presenting a documented chronology and explaining the settlement patterns of the Parthian period and the cultural effect on the region in this period.

◆ Research method

In excavating the Kasegaran II site, the contexts method was used for excavation and the Harris Matrix diagram was used to show the precedence and latency of different contexts. The context method was such that each soil layer that had a completely different texture, color, density, or cultural data from the previous layer was contractually assigned a context number. Each context was identified by the name *Cont* and a number starting with 1000 (e.g. Cont: 1001).

◆ The geographical location of Kasegaran II site

Kashegaran II site is located in Piranshahr City, in the northwest of Iran, with the geographical coordinates of N 36°37'7.74" and E 45°13'47.69" and an altitude of 1400 meters above sea level. The current bed of the Zab River passes through at a distance of 120 meters. The nearest heights to this area are Qandil Mountains. Kasegaran II site is a natural site with a bed of calcareous clay. The apex of this site is almost flat, which has been under beet cultivation for a long time, and its western part continues with a relatively steep slope to the bank of the Zab River.

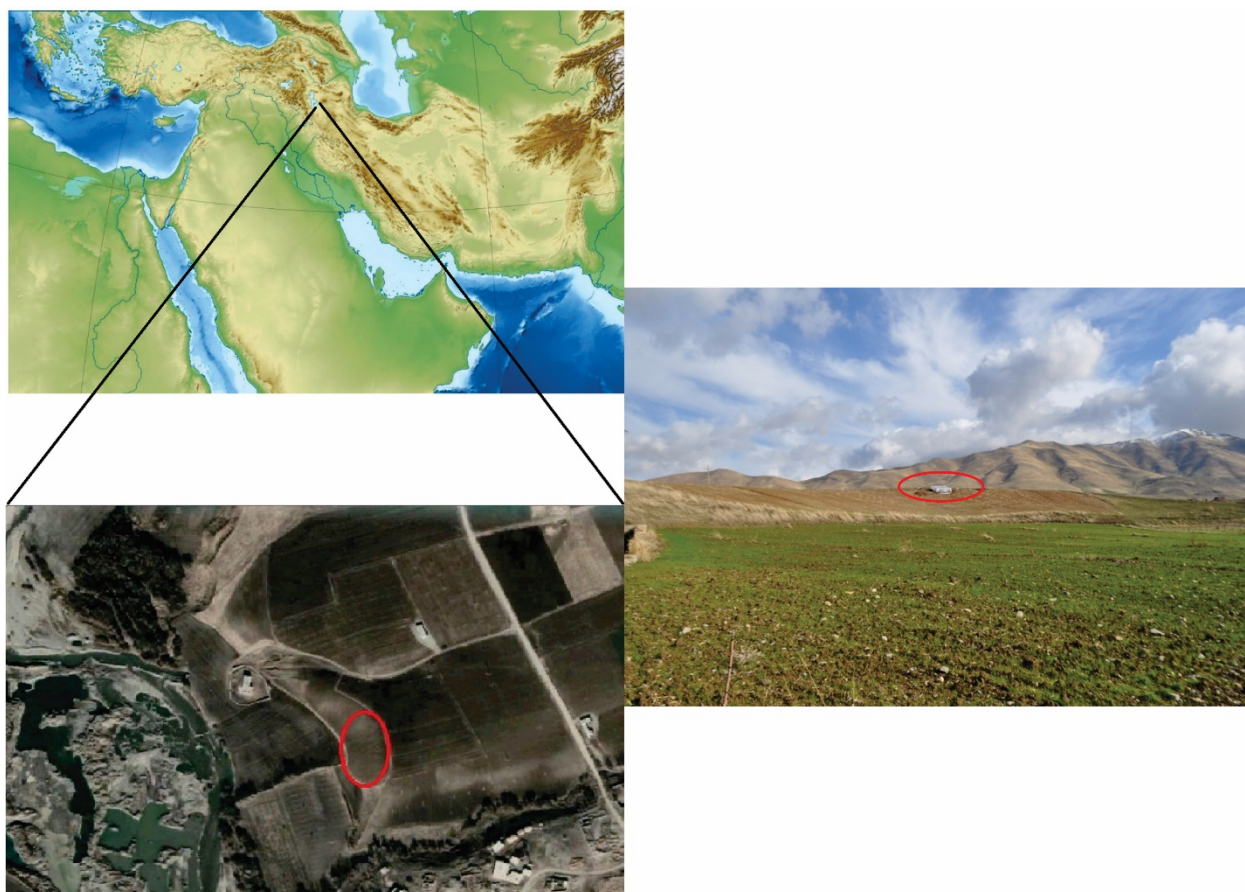


Fig. 1. Geographical location of Kasegaran II site.
Localizarea geografică a sitului Kasegaran II.

◆ The excavated trenches

After preliminary archaeological surveys, carried out by the authors at the surface of the Kaseshagaran II site, it was determined that the surface data of the site generally belong to the Parthian period. On this basis, the first excavation season of the site of Kasegaran II was dedicated to the achievement of six trenches with the names Tr.1, Tr.2, Tr.3, Tr.4, Tr.5, Tr.6 in different places, which had a better background in terms of accumulation rate than other areas (fig. 2). The excavated trenches have three different contexts. They include the first context of the surface layer of the site, the second context as an occupation layer that is dark brown, and context 3 as the natural soil bed of the site. The excavated trenches determined the status of the settlement in this site. Accordingly, the site was used in the Parthian period. Trench 1 was considered as the reference stratigraphic section of the site.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was created in the determined northern part of the studied site, in the north of the slope. The reason for selecting this place to create a trench was the considerable volume of pottery that was more visible in this part than anywhere else (fig. 3). This trench has dimensions of 5 x 5 meters and the highest point of the trench is its eastern corner.

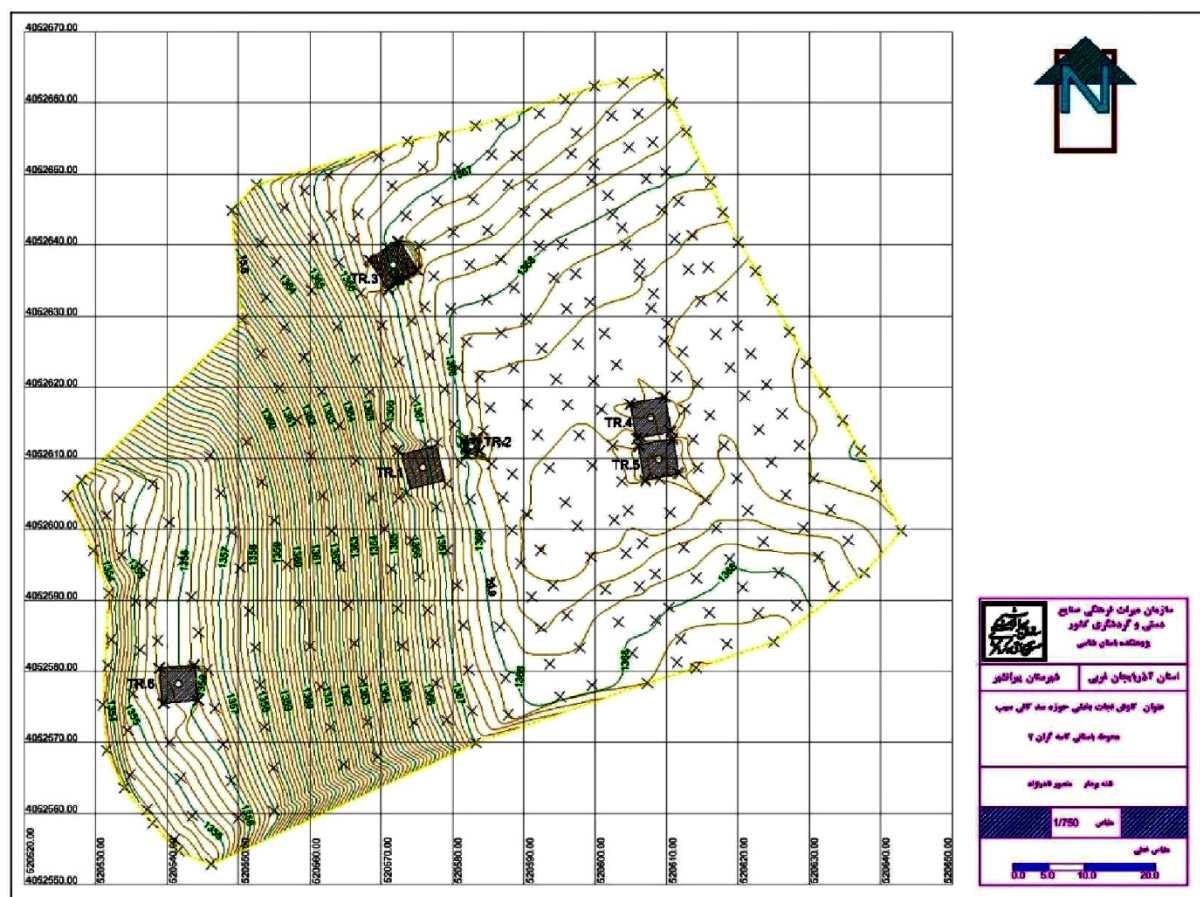


Fig. 2. Location of the excavated trenches in Kasegran II site.
Localizarea șanțurilor excavate în situl Kasegran II.

Context 1 001

This context contains dark-colored soil on which plowing traces can be seen up to a depth of about 20 cm. This context is, in fact, organic humic soil, containing pottery pieces, plant roots, and scattered cobbles. Almost all the pottery pieces obtained in this part included the body of the vessels. The thickness of this context was about 20 to 25 cm. As mentioned, working on the surface of this context was very difficult due to its wetness and it was separated from the ground in the form of sticky pieces of mud. Its cultural materials consisted only of clay pieces, the majority of which were made of pottery.

Context 1 002

This context became apparent after context 1 in the southwestern half of the trench, which was clearly visible in the central wall of the trench. In fact, after excavating about 20 to 25 cm from the context of 1001, the trench soil came out of the dark state. Its texture was also firmer and contained very large particles of lime. In this context, the soil was light brown with a lot of calcareous inclusions. The excavation surface of context 2 002 in the western half of the trench went to a depth of 130 cm relative to the eastern corner. The color and texture of the soil did not change to the mentioned depth and did not contain any cultural materials. The excavation of the eastern half of the trench continued to a depth of 78 cm relative to the eastern corner of the trench. The soil was light brown with lime particles and, like the western half, it

lacked any cultural material. Despite the higher density of pottery in this part of the site, the cultural deposit of this part was very low compared to other parts and generally the topsoil had pottery pieces to a depth of about 20 to 25 cm. Excavation of the complete surface of Trench I was stopped in the western half to a depth of 130 and in the eastern half to a depth of about 78 cm relative to the southeast corner.

Context 1 003

This context has been assigned to the natural bed of the site, which lacks any cultural materials and human activities. Other trenches of this site have been similar to this trench in terms of excavated layers, which are briefly described in table 1 (tab. 1).



Fig. 3. Trench 1.
Şanţul 1.

Trench	Context	Texture	Depth (cm)	Depth (cm)	Cultural materials
2	2001	Topsoil	0	80	Pottery
	2002	Clay saturated with lime	81	90	Pottery
	2003	Virgin Soil	90	-	-
3	3001	Topsoil	0	25	Pottery
	3002	Clay saturated with lime and ash	26	84	Pottery
	3003	Virgin Soil	86	-	-
4	4001	Topsoil	0	36	Pottery
	4002	Clay saturated with grains of lime	36	50	Pottery
	4003	Virgin soil of site	50	-	-
5	5001	Topsoil	0	30	Pottery
	5002	Clay saturated with grains of lime	31	40	Pottery
	5003	Virgin soil	40	-	-
6	6001	Topsoil	0	30	Pottery
	6002	Clay saturated with grains of lime	31	40	Pottery
	6003	Virgin soil of site	41	-	-

Tab. 1. Features of excavated trenches of Kasegaran II site.
Caracteristici ale șanțurilor excavate în situl Kasegaran II.

◆ Pottery findings

About 360 pieces of pottery were obtained from the site of Kasegaran II during an archaeological excavation season. 203 pieces, which were very small and non-diagnostic, were counted as statistical samples, and 157 pieces, which included larger pieces and a number of criteria, were recorded in the pottery information table. Among these potteries, 94 pieces were selected for drawings. In this article, 5 pottery has been studied as a sample (fig. 4). These potteries are generally related to small and medium-sized vessels that have been common and everyday items, and mostly include bowls, open-mouthed jugs. Most of the pottery obtained from this hill is related to the body of earthenware; the body of earthenware makes up about 75% of the findings, the edge about 15%, the base about 6%, the handle less than 1%, and other findings of pottery about 2% of the total potteries obtained from the Kasegaran II site. The pottery register table also describes the type of decoration, pottery coating, paste, thickness, and their size (tab. 1).

Pottery register table of Kasegaran II site

About 40% of the potteries obtained from Kasegaran II site are in red spectrum (red, terracotta, orange) and about 2% of them are of gray type of pottery. 54% of the obtained pottery was also in the brown spectrum. About 11% of the potteries had traces of wash and about 2% of them had slip. Thus, most of the potteries obtained from this site was in brown spectrum. The red color spectrum also makes up the most color after brown (fig. 5).

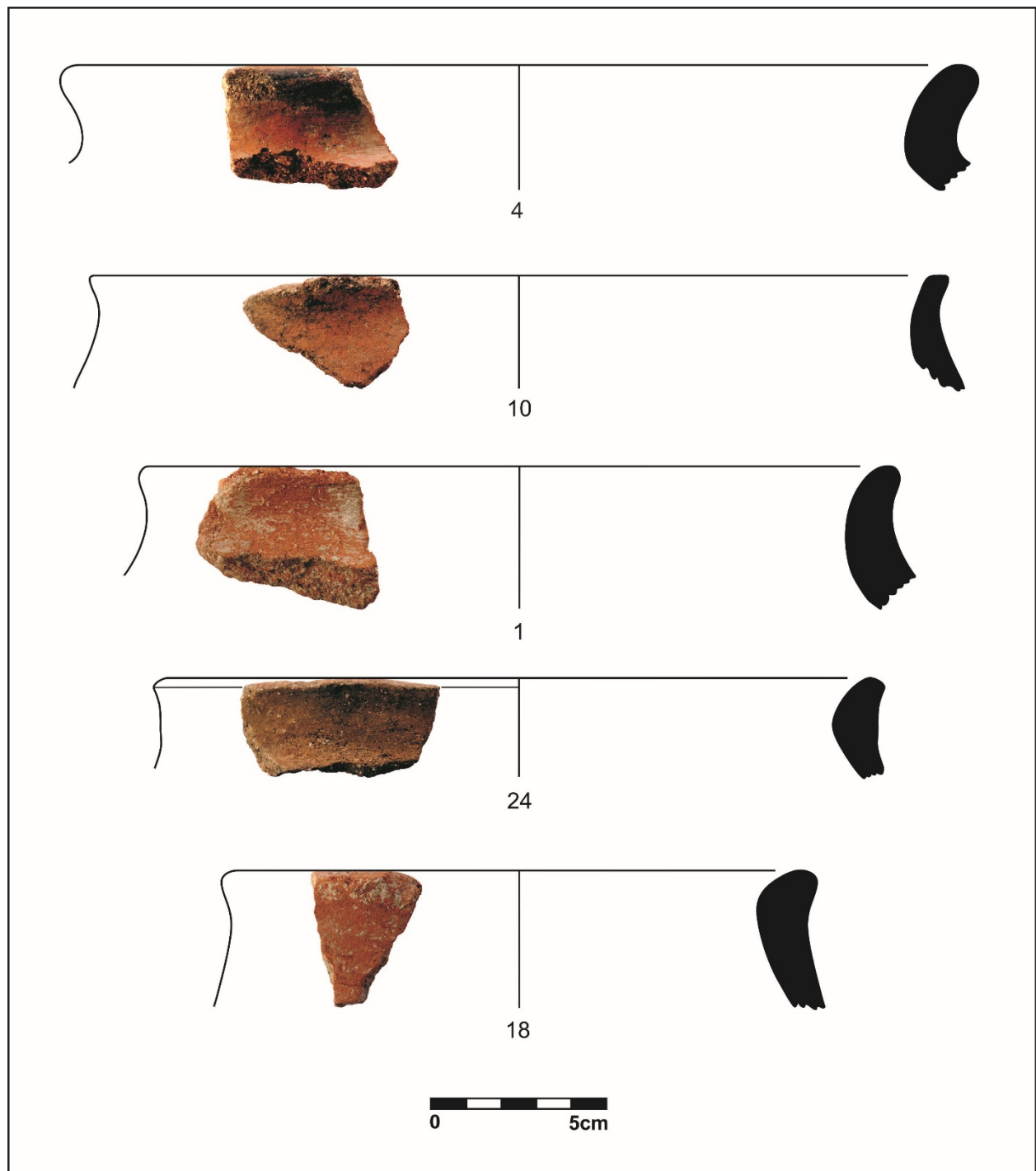


Fig. 4. Pottery of Kasegaran II site.
Ceramica din situl Kasegaran II.

Potteries of Kasegaran II site are generally handmade (90%) in terms of construction and only 10% of them are made with a potter wheel. Wheel-making vessels generally consisted of small jugs and bowls. Most of the potteries obtained from this area has about 76% adequate combustion and the rest has about 24% incomplete firing. Some potteries are also of type of kitchen and smoky.

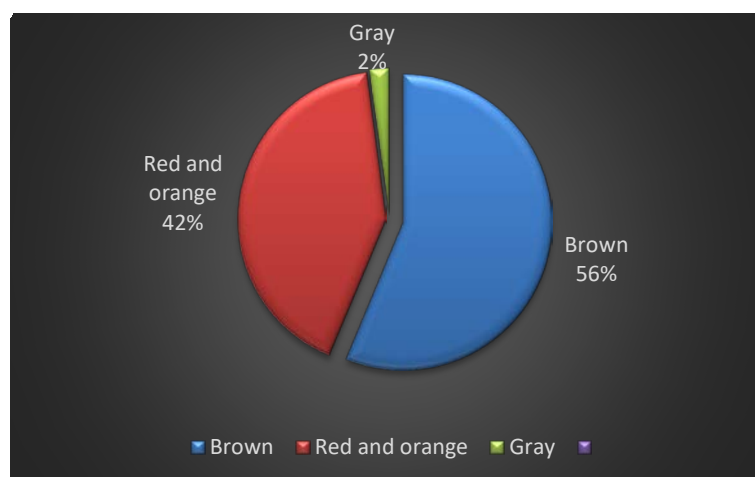


Fig. 5. Percentage distribution of color spectrum of pottery in Kasegaran site II.
Distribuția procentuală a spectrului de culori al ceramicii din situl Kasegaran II.

Pottery decorations

In Kasegaran II site, a very small number of potteries are decorated with added or incised reliefs. About 9% had added decoration and only one piece of registered pottery was decorated. This method of decoration actually included adding strings of flowers to the body of pottery, which in some cases, after adding this flower, they decorated in different ways. These decorations include rope-shaped ornaments. Another way of decorating pottery was that after shaping the pottery and before firing it in the kiln, they created motifs or reliefs on the vessels in the form of incised using sharp objects. This type of decoration was parallel and wavy in the form of incised reliefs (*intaglio*).

Chronology of pottery

The collection of potteries obtained from the excavation of Kasegaran II site is limited in terms of variety and the relatively small number of embossed pieces. Regarding the samples of potteries obtained from the Parthian and Sassanid sites of the western and northwestern regions of Iran, there are similarities between the collection of the potteries of this site and the Parthian potteries of other sites, such as the pottery of Qal'eh Zohak in Hashtrud (J. Ghandgar 2000; W. Kleiss 1973, p. 184-185), Bisotun in Kermanshah (W. Kleiss 1970, p. 158-168), Bakhtak Castle in Malekan (S. Abdi, M. Vahedi 2016, p. 584-594), Mahneshan Castle in Zanjan (A. Khosrozadeh, A. Aali 2010, p. 90), Kohne Pasgah (B. Aqalari, M. Deh Pahlaven 2011, p. 33), Qezel Qayah Hill in Meshgin Shahr (R. Rezalu 2018, p. 589), and Soghanlui site of Piranshahr (E. Bodaqi 2019, p. 70).

◆ Stone tools

Due to geographical location of Kasegaran II site, which is located on a river terrace, and in terms of the landscape and its natural potentials including the richness of vegetation and, consequently, the animal population of the region, it could be a very suitable place to attract population. 19 pieces of stone tools were found in the excavation of trenches (fig. 6). All of them are non-significant samples and do not help much in determining their relative age.

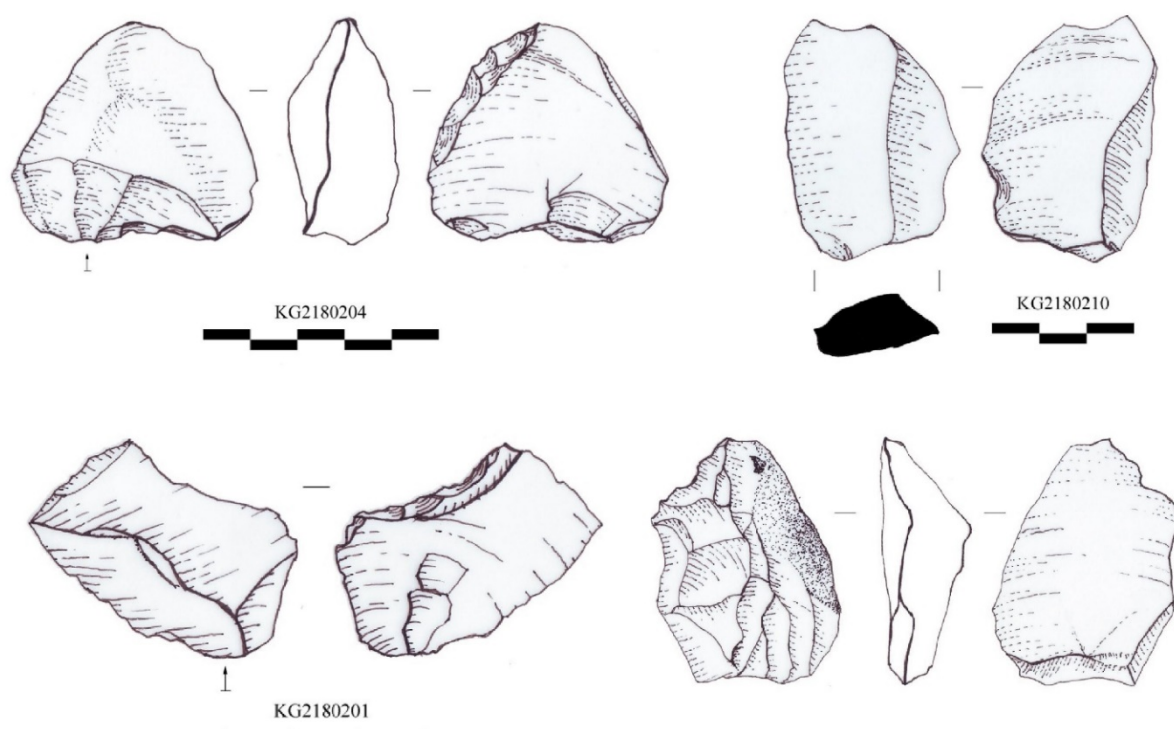


Fig. 6. A sample of stone tools discovered at Kasegaran II site.
Un eșantion de unelte de piatră descoperite în situl Kasegaran II.

◆ Archaeofauna

In the excavation of trenches 1, 2, and 5, 13 pieces of animal bones were found (fig. 7). These bones include the small ruminants, domestic goat (*Capra hircus*), horse, and domestic cow (*Bos taurus*). It seems that these bones belonged to animals that contributed to the livelihood of people living in Kasegaran II site.

◆ Conclusions

The settlement status and sequence of the cultural layer of the site were determined based on the results of the excavation of six trenches in Kasegaran II site. Accordingly, considering the volume of pottery data and the lack of evidence of architecture in this area, it can be concluded that the site has been used as a temporary settlement; Therefore, in general, by analyzing the data obtained from the excavation, it can be inferred that most of the identified sites from Parthian settlements in Piranshahr City, only included a period of poor settlement pattern. These settlements were formed in a place where there has been no occupation of other periods in these sites, and the Parthian monolayer establishment has not been considered either before or after. Single-period settlements, which often lacked architecture and only resided in certain seasons of the year, can be attributed to nomadic tribes.



Fig. 7. A sample of animal bones discovered at Kasegaran II site.
Un eșantion de oase de animale descoperite în situl Kasegaran II.

Regarding the expansion of settlements and nomadic communities in the Piranshahr region during the Parthian period (247 BC to 224 AD), it seems that there was an uncontrolled expansion of population or a kind of population explosion and consequently a lack of primary resources, especially for ranchers who are leading groups of these tribes to mountainous and uninhabited areas for the first time and have left their mark in some neighborhoods.

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