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Controlling the Plain. The Analysis of the Settlement Patterns of the Salmas Plain, Iran, from the Prehistoric to the Sasanian Periods.

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Abstract

This contribution aims to provide a detailed diachronic analysis of the settlement patterns in the Salmas plain, in north-western Iran. The chronological period taken into consideration goes from Prehistory to the Sasanian period, covering the entire pre-Islamic period. The work is based on a comprehensive re-evaluation of the archaeological data available to us, as well as new data produced using remote sensing. The contribution analyses the forms of interaction and control of the territory operated by the sites, in particular the fortified ones, and reconstructs for the periods for which the data are sufficient the management strategies of the plain using GIS software, as well as the analysis of the points of sight and intervisibility. The result is a highly complex and articulated situation where the settlement patterns have not always been the same over time although some forms of continuity can be noted. Due to its position and geographical characteristics, the Salmas plain is in all respects a place of great importance in the study of the archaeology of north-western Iran. It is no coincidence that key-sites such as Haftavan Tappeh or Qara Tappeh have had a long history spanning from Protohistory to the historical period. The aim of this contribution is therefore to be a first review and re-evaluation of the archaeological information of the Salmas plain and a recontextualisation of the sites in the pre-protohistoric and historical dynamics of the area examined using tools like G.I.S.

Keywords: Prehistory, Protohistory, Historical Period, Salmas Plain, Settlement Pattern.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

The Orumiyeh region in north-western Iran represents an area of extraordinary interest from a geographical and archaeological perspective[1]. This is in fact one of the few regions of the internal territory corresponding to the land of Iran that has been the subject of systematic investigations over a very large territory for which a vast amount of homogeneous data is available, and which has yet to be largely interpreted using modern approaches to scientific research. From a territorial point of view, the Lake Orumiyeh basin, a mainly mountainous region, is dotted with a series of flat areas connected by narrow intermountain valleys, which still constitute the main communication

[1]The authors of this article want to thank Stephan Kroll for having shared important and unpublished information. The contents of this article are the result of joint work done by the authors. Specifically, the 'Introduction' and 'Conclusions' were written jointly. Roberto Dan and Andrea Cesaretti wrote jointly 'Catalogue of the sites', 'Methodology and Aims' and 'The Analysis of Settlement Pattern in a Diachronic Perspective'. Roberto Dan wrote 'Geographical Environment', 'Chalcolithic period', 'Early Bronze Age, 'Middle Iron Age/Urartu', 'Sasanian period'. Andrea Cesaretti wrote 'History of Studies', 'Neolithic period', 'Middle Bronze Age', 'Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age', 'Late Iron Age/Achaemenid period'. Davide Salaris wrote 'Viewshed and Intervisibility Analysis'.

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routes today. Among the various flat areas subject to archaeological investigations, certainly one of the most relevant is the plain of Salmas. In fact, in this area, located between the chain of the Zagros Mountains and the north-western margins of Lake Orumiyeh, many archaeological activities have been concentrated, which has made it possible to obtain a quantity of data that, numerically speaking, has few comparisons with the areas neighbouring. The Salmas plain is also particularly important due to its strategic location as an obligatory passage between the Armenian Highlands and the Iranian Plateau, as well as a privileged connection point between the basin of Lake Van and that of Orumiyeh. The Salmas plain also contains extraordinary archaeological evidence, both for protohistoric times (the sites at Haftavan Tappeh or Qara Tappeh on the others) and for historical times, such as the site of Ardarshir I's Sasanian relief at Khantakh (Figure.1).

The aim of this contribution is to present for the first time a detailed analysis of the settlement pattern of this area in a diachronic key starting from the final phases of the Prehistory until the Salmas Plain entered the possessions of the great empires, first the Achaemenid and then the Sasanian. To do this, a complete review of the literature referring to the area was carried out, along with a systematisation of the available data and the integration of new information obtained using remote sensing. The picture that emerged from this analysis shows an archaeological scenario of great interest and complexity, with specific dynamics for each individual period that have been reconstructed in detail.

Geographical Environment

The Salmas Plain is in the northwest corner of Lake Orumiyeh. This area is 32,000 ha in size and is traversed by the Zolā Čaye's tributaries (de Planhol 1989). The river originates in the Zagros Mountains to the west and ends its journey in the waters of Lake Orumiyeh. The construction of an artificial dam, called Shohada dam, at the last mountainous foothills on the western edge of the plain has considerably reduced the flow of the river. The plain is flanked on the north, west, and south

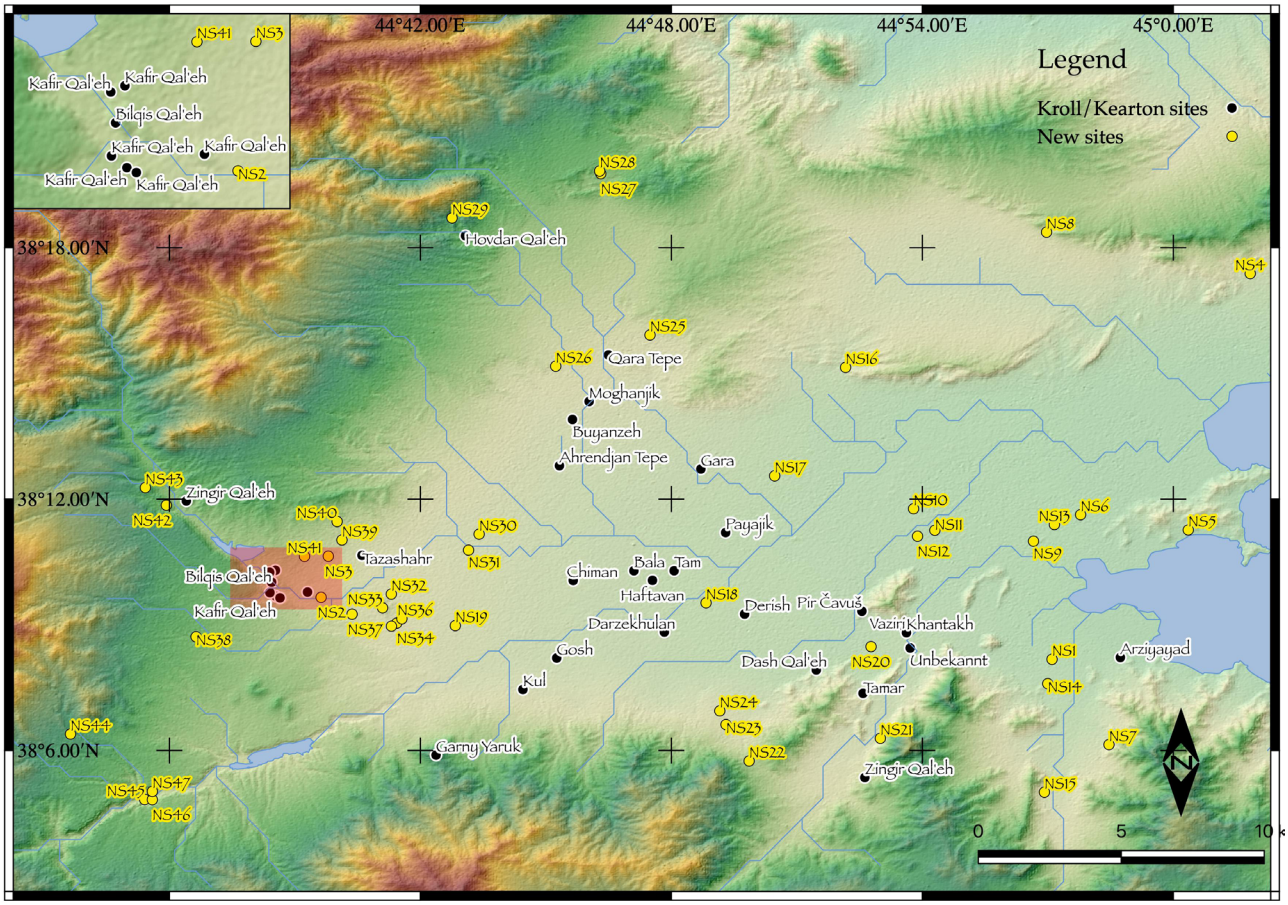


Figure. 1: *Distribution map of the sites of the plain of Salmas mentioned in the text (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

sides by low mountain ranges, while the west side is washed by the brackish waters of Orumiyeh Lake. In evaluating the extension of the plain, it is necessary to consider the dramatic process of retraction of the lake's waters in recent years, a circumstance that has led the Salmas plain to be more extensive than in ancient times. The plain has an average height of about 1300 metres above sea level with a degrading trend from west (1480 m a.s.l.) to east (1280 m a.s.l.). The soils of the Salmas area are classified as Brown Steppe Soils, which are the most common soils in Iran (Dewan – Famouri 1968: 256-257, Figure. 84). From the point of view of potential, the soils of this area are classified as characterised by limitations due to the presence of dissected relief, shallow depth, and an endemic moderate deficit of water. From a climatic point of view, the plain falls within the so-called Zagros Zone, which is characterised by a very low January mean value that almost approaches freezing point. August is the warmest month (Ganji 1968: 228, Figure. 77).

History of Studies

The Salmas plain has been the subject of several archaeological investigations, almost entirely happened in pre-revolution phase. Investigations in more recent years have been sporadic and, in any case, not on a large scale. The first investigations in the Salmas area date back to the excavations conducted by C.A. Burney on several occasions starting in 1958 at the Haftavan Tappeh site.

The archaeologist here was confronted on the one hand with an archaeological site of fundamental importance, which at the same time had been the subject of semi-illegal excavations conducted almost thirty years earlier. Burney was able to recover information regarding the massive trenches that crossed the site and were opened between 1933 and 1934 by a certain Butamin. He had not published anything about it, and indeed, he seemed to have left the excavations quickly with the boxes of collected materials. Burney's investigations restarted on the site and lasted until about 1973, even if the most relevant investigation campaigns were those of 1968 and 1969 (Edwards 1983: V, VII).

The first attempt at a systematic study in the Salmas region was that conducted by the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, as part of the larger work of the Hasanlu Project, directed by R.H. Dyson Jr. The research activities were conducted by R. Kearton between September 1967 and October 1968 in the context of the preparation of an unpublished doctoral thesis, which was then discussed in 1970 (Kearton 1969; Kearton 1970). This work, which presents a series of problems that will be discussed within this same text, has led to the identification of 47 sites of archaeological interest in the area in an period between Prehistory and the modern age. Subsequently, the systematic investigations concerning the archaeological landscape aimed to identify the largest number of sites in the area can be referred to the activities carried out in the Orumiyeh area between 1968 and 1978 by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (D.A.I.). In particular, the activities of the German mission, directed by W. Kleiss and assisted by S. Kroll, were carried out in the years 1967 and 1978. The archaeological activities of the D.A.I. have certainly produced the most relevant amount of data, not so much in terms of numbers as for the quality of the data produced. As part of these investigations, a total of 27 archaeological sites dating from the Prehistory to the late Islamic period were discovered[1]. The research of the D.A.I. mainly concentrated on the study and identification of the fortified complexes, which are physiologically located on high ground, on the edge of the flat area, and on the communication routes. In contrast, Kearton concentrated almost exclusively on flat land (tappeh). After 1978, archaeological research in the Orumiyeh region essentially stopped except for sporadic and not very systematic initiatives both for surveys and archaeological excavations. As far as the Salmas plain is concerned, the survey work conducted by H. Tala'i on the site of Ahrendjan Tappeh should be mentioned (Tala'i 1983). In the same way as in Qara Tappeh in 1992, B. Kargar conducted excavations within the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation, as reported in his master's thesis, discussed at the University of Tehran but not published (Kargar 1995). In 2019 new excavations were carried out in Ahrendjan Tappeh by A. Geravand and F. Malekpour within the works of the *Iranian centre for Archaeological Research* (I.C.A.R.) (Geravand – Malekpour 2021: 719-728).

[1]The data collected from the work of the D.A.I. were summarised in S. Kroll's teaching qualification thesis, which has remained unpublished (Kroll 1994). The information that Kroll reports is that of the presence on a map published by Edwards of two ancient Bronze Age sites apparently located southeast of the Salmas Plain, near the lake. However, no further details are known (Edwards 1983, Figure. 3; Kroll 1994).

In the same year, reconnaissance was carried out by an Iranian-Italian team in the mountain area in the Salmas region, aimed at investigating a series of structures known in the literature as "*giant houses*" (Khanmohammadi *et al*. 2020: 80-96).

Methodology and Aims

The nucleus of archaeological data on which the database that allowed the reconstruction of the settlement dynamics of the Salmas Plain was built is based on a lot of sites identified mainly in the reconnaissance of the University of Pennsylvania and the D.A.I. In choosing the material to be used, a series of choices of both geographical and chronological nature were made. The first step that was carried out was to delimit a specific area within which to carry out geospatial analyses, which would help with the correct georeferencing of the sites and the consequent quantitative analyses. To accomplish this, a virtual rectangle was constructed that covered the plain of Salmas and its immediate surroundings and was further subdivided inside it into squares of 6 km on each side. However, this area is sufficient to cover the extension of the plain of Salmas and the main neighbouring mountainous areas but not to cover the entire extension of the modern province of Salmas. For this reason, some of the sites studied by the German mission that fell outside the selected area were excluded from our analysis[1] . Instead, all the sites identified by Kearton fell within the selected area, since the scholar concentrated mainly on the plain area. While no selection criteria were applied to the material produced by the German mission from the point of view of chronological attributions, which, despite the age of the data, are still largely reliable at least as regards the final stages of Prehistory and a large part of the Protohistory, a rather large number of sites identified as "pre-modern" by Kearton were instead excluded from our analysis, both for the very wide chronological range attributed to the sites and because this did not allow for any punctual scanning from a chronological point of view. Basically, for Kearton's data, only sites between the Neolithic and a generic Iron Age were taken into consideration. The decisive aspect for the development of this study was the overall georeferencing process of the mass of selected data that was inserted into a spatial coordinate system for the first time. The georeferencing process was rather laborious and not without difficulties; it took place through the detailed study of the cartography available in the scientific literature, mainly made up of silent maps or hand-made sketches of the landscape or entirely hand-made distribution maps as in the case of Kearton, with some inspections in the Salmas area carried out between 2013 and 2018 and thanks above all to the use of remote sensing methodologies. Within the catalogue of sites that follows this paragraph, a specific item refers to the reliability of the possible identification of the sites on the ground. It can be stated with a good degree of confidence, especially as regards the data produced by the D.A.I., that the complex of sites has been located with a large margin of accuracy. The identification of the Kearton sites was instead much more complex due to the total absence of descriptions relating to the positioning and geomorphological characteristics of the sites. For this reason, an integral mapping was carried out, starting precisely from the satellite photograph of the archaeological evidence present in the selected area. This allowed the identification of 60 potential archaeological sites, of which 13 were recognised as possible sites identified by Kearton. The detailed study of the territory and of the archaeological sites has also made it possible to assess the state of conservation of the sites and to draw a map of the risk to the archaeological assets of the Salmas Plain, which in some cases are well preserved, in others partially or heavily damaged, and in others, unfortunately, destroyed (Figure.2). The reconstruction of the settlement pattern, carried out using G.I.S. (Geographical Information System) software on the 24 archaeological sites selected from the data of the D.A.I. for Salmas and the 13 identified Kearton sites, naturally excluded the new possible archaeological evidence identified due to the absence of any information of a chronological nature on these sites. The latter evidence was only important for developing hypotheses on the reconstruction of the settlement density in the selected area.

Viewshed and Intervisibility Analysis

The use of viewshed and intervisibility analysis in archaeology is a comprehensive and valuable tool for evaluating archaeological data and reconstructing ancient landscapes. It provides insights into the visual relationships between archaeological sites

[1] These sites are Ahudarreh Qal'eh (SL9), Çariq (SL13), Çariq (SL14), Ali Bulagh (SL22), Zingir Qal'eh (SL23), Asbešan (SL25), Šinatal (SL26), and Balkajan (SL27).

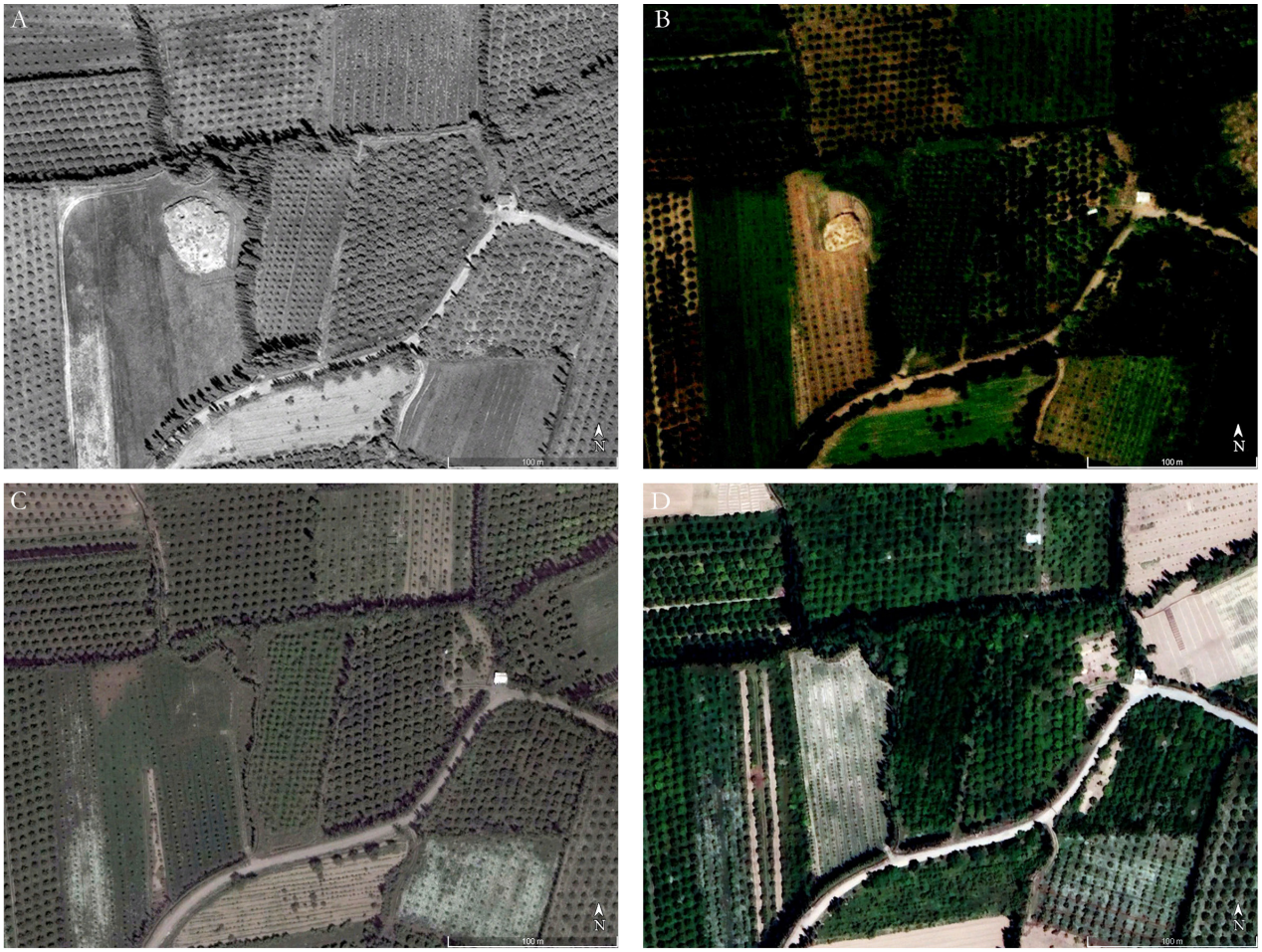


Figure. 2: *Photographic documentation relating to the progressive destruction of the Gosh site (After: Google Earth A.11/ 08/2008; B.09 /06/2012; C. 20/05/2015; D. 13/05/2021).*

and their surrounding environments (DeMers 2000). This type of analysis is especially useful in the study of the Salmas plain in north-western Iran, which boasts an extensive collection of data from Prehistory to the Sasanian period, offering an opportunity to examine the visual communication and interaction between ancient settlements and fortified sites throughout the pre-Islamic period. To conduct the analysis, this study used the open-source Geographic Information System (GIS) software, QGIS, and its Visibility Analysis plugin (Čučkovic 2016). This computational programme enables the processing of topographic data, represented by a Digital Elevation Model (DEM), to calculate intervisibility between sites and to generate a grid in which every cell has a visibility value that represents the number of observation points from where it can be seen. The outcome of the computational process is usually a raster file in which each cell represents the level of intervisibility from an observer to the surrounding area (Lake – Woodman 2003; De Montis – Caschili 2012). This information can then be used to evaluate the degree of intervisibility between key sites in the region and the level of control exercised by fortified centres over the territory and communication network. The visual aspect of a site is recognised as a crucial consideration in determining the suitability of a location for settlements, religious structures, or monuments of significance to a community (Wheatley – Gillings 2002; Brughmans – Brandes 2017). Through viewshed analysis, regions visible from a specific point in the terrain can be defined, and by combining multiple viewsheds, areas of significance within the ancient landscape can be uncovered (Garcia-Moreno 2013). In the context of the Salmas Plain, this type of analysis offers a fresh perspective on the territorial and cultural dynamics of the region, including the positioning of settlements and fortifications and the communication and exchange patterns between communities. The intervisibility of sites within the

plain can also be assessed, providing insight into the level of control and communication between sites and their relationships with their surroundings. For instance, Dan and Salaris (Dan – Salaris 2022) used viewshed analysis and intervisibility to investigate the intervisibility of 16 Urartian fortifications in the eastern shore valley of Lake Van and their relationship with the major sites of Van Kalesi and Toprakkale. In conclusion, the integration of viewshed and intervisibility analysis in the study of the Salmas plain holds great promise for advancing our comprehension of the cultural and territorial dynamics of the region. The use of these techniques, in conjunction with the integration of topographic data and the application of GIS software such as QGIS, presents a solid methodology for archaeologists to re-examine the archaeological data in the area. Further investigation in this field has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of the visual landscape of ancient communities and the relationships between various sites and their surrounding environments.

Catalogue of the Sites

NEO: Neolithic
CHL: Chalcolithic
EBA: Early Bronze Age
MBA: Middle Bronze Age
LBA: Late Bronze Age
EIA: Early Iron Age
MIA: Middle Iron Age
LIA: Late Iron Age
SEL: Seleucid Period
PAR: Parthian Period
SAS: Sasanian Period
MA: Middle Age
LMA: Late Middle Age

Code: SL1

Site name: Haftavan Tappeh
Site type: tappeh
Coordinates: 38°10'3.70"N 44°47'32.83"E
Elevation: 1370 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, MBA, LBA, EIA, MIA (Urartu), LIA, SAS
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: badly damaged
Literature: Burney 1970, Burney 1972, Burney 1973, Burney 1976a, Burney 1976b, Burney 1976c, Edwards 1981, Edwards 1986, Sagona 1984, Kroll 1994.

Code: SL2

Site name: Ahrendjan Tappeh
Site type: tappeh
Coordinates: 38°12’47.80”N 44°45’19.40”E
Elevation: 1398 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: NEO, CHL
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: badly damaged
Literature: Tala’i 1983: 7-17; Geravand – Malekpour 2021: 719-728; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL3

Site name: Qara Tappeh
Site type: tappeh
Coordinates: 38°15’26.48”N 44°46’29.70”E
Elevation: 1465 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: NEO, EBA, MBA, LBA, LIA, SAS
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: badly damaged
Literature: Dyson 1973; Kroll 1994; Kargar 1995.

Code: SL4

Site name: Pir Čavuš
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38° 9’19.50”N 44°52’33.22”E
Elevation: 1417 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MIA (Urartu), LMA
Geographical position: rock outcrop
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kleiss 1968: 33, Figure. 22.25; Kleiss 1969: 73-74, Figure. 77, pl. 37.2; Kroll 1976: 82-83, Figure. 33; Kleiss – Kroll 1979: 183-189, 224, 225, Figures. 1-8, Kroll 1994.

Code: SL5

Site name: Arziyayad
Site type: tappeh
Coordinates: 38° 8’13.29”N 44°58’43.98”E
Elevation: 1295m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EIA, MIA, LIA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kroll 1994.

Code: SL6

Site name: Khantakh relief
Site type: relief
Coordinates: 38° 8’48.69”N 44°53’37.13”E
Elevation: 1351 m a.s.l.

Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: SAS
Geographical position: rock outcrop
State of preservation: well preserved
Literature: Hinz 1965: 148-160, pl. 69-71; Kroll 1994; Shavarebi 2014[1].

Code: SL7

Site name: Qal'eh Vaziri
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38° 8'54.04"N 44°53'35.36"E
Elevation: 1400 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, MBA, LBA, EIA, MIA (Urartu)
Geographical position: rock outcrop
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kleiss 1968: 33, Figure. 22-24; Kleiss 1969: 24, Figures. 20.4, 22; Kroll 1976: 84-85, Figure. 34; Kleiss – Kroll 1979: 189-190, 226-228, Figures. 9-11, Kroll 1994.

Code: SL8

Site name: Tamar Tappeh (Unbekannt)
Site type: tappeh
Coordinates: 38° 8'26.79"N 44°53'42.48"E
Elevation: 1343 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: highly possible
Chronology: CHL
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kroll 1994

Code: SL10

Site name: Zingir Qal'eh
Site type: rock-cut structures
Coordinates: 38° 5'21.36"N 44°52'37.45"E
Elevation: 1566 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: highly possible
Chronology: MIA, LIA, EMA
Geographical position: rock outcrop
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Schippmann 1967: 77-81; Schippmann 1971: 362-368, Figures. 47-49; Kleiss 1968: 40-42; Kleiss 1969: 24, Figure. 22; Kroll 1976: 86-87, Figure. 35; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL11

Site name: Tamar
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38° 7'21.87"N 44°52'34.84"E
Elevation: 1409 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EIA (?)
Geographical position: hill slope
State of preservation: well preserved
Literature: Kleiss 1969: 13, Figure. 5, plt. 3.1-2, Kroll 1994.

Code: SL12

Site name: Garny Yaruk (Karniarouk)
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38° 5'53.54"N 44°42'22.44"E
Elevation: 1870 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MIA (Urartu), LMA
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: well preserved
Literature: Kleiss 1968: 36-38, Figures. 26-28, pl. 12; Kleiss 1969: 24, Figures. 22, 71-72, 75, pl. 37; Kroll 1976: 85-86; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL15

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38° 9'40.75"N 44°38'33.10"E
Elevation: 1530 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, MIA (Urartu)
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: preserved
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 29, 60-61, Figures. 2-3; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL16

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: settlement
Coordinates: 38° 9'46.11"N 44°38'24.14"E
Elevation: 1537 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: CHL, EBA, EIA, MIA (Urartu)
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: preserved
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 29-33, 61; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL17

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: fortress
Coordinates: 38° 9'38.56"N 44°38'38.59"E
Elevation: 1526 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MBA(?), EIA(?), MIA (Urartu), LIA (Achaemenid), LMA

[1]More literature on this relief can be found in this article.

Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: badly damaged
Literature: Kleiss 1968, 31, Figure. 21; Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 29-33, 61-62, Figures. 2-5; Kroll 1976: 81-82, Figure. 32; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL18

Site name: Bilqis Qal'eh
Site type: settlement
Coordinates: 38°10'1.17"N 44°38'26.56"E
Elevation: 1570 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MIA (Urartu), LMA
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: preserved
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 28, 62, Figure. 2; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL19

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°10'18.05"N 44°38'31.96"E
Elevation: 1535 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, LMA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: well preserved
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 28, 62, Figure. 2; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL20

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: fortified complex
Coordinates: 38°10'15.18"N 44°38'23.76"E
Elevation: 1530 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: LMA
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: partly damaged
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 28, 62, Figure. 2; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL21

Site name: Kafir Qal'eh
Site type: settlement
Coordinates: 38° 9'46.89"N 44°39'18.07"E
Elevation: 1520 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EIA, EMA
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: preserved
Literature: Kleiss – Kroll 1978: 29, 62, Figure. 2; Kroll 1994.

Code: SL24

Site name: Hovdar Qal'eh
Site type: fortified complex, settlement
Coordinates: 38°18'16.99"N 44°43'4.65"E
Elevation: 1655 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MIA (Urartu)(?), LMA
Geographical position: hilltop
State of preservation: preserved
Literature: Kleiss 1974: 94-98, Figures. 16-19, pl. 21, 2-3; Kroll 1976: 85; Kroll 1994.

Code: 51

Site name: Derish
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38° 9'15.39"N 44°49'44.97"E
Elevation: 1350 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, MBA, IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 52

Site name: Payajik
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°11'12.11"N 44°49'17.77"E
Elevation: 1350 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: CHL, LBA/EIA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 53

Site name: Gara
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°12'43.08"N 44°48'42.26"E
Elevation: 1370 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: NEO, CHL, EBA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: badly damaged
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 54

Site name: Tam
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°10'17.44"N 44°48'3.88"E
Elevation: 1355 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: NEO
Geographical position: open plain

State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 56

Site name: Chiman
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°10’3.46”N 44°45’39.15”E
Elevation: 1380 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: LBA/EIA, IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 57

Site name: Bala
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°10’17.41”N 44°47’6.22”E
Elevation: 1365 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: EBA, MBA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: damaged
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 71

Site name: Moghanjik
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°14’19.80”N 44°46’1.95”E
Elevation: 1430 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: uncertain
Chronology: CHL, EBA, MBA, LBA/EIA, IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 72

Site name: Buyanzeh
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°13’53.99”N 44°45’38.10”E
Elevation: 1420 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: uncertain
Chronology: IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 238

Site name: Dash Qal‘eh
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38° 7’55.36”N 44°51’27.81”E
Elevation: 1350 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: IA
Geographical position: rock spur
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 321.

Code: 248

Site name: Darzekhulan
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38° 8’49.61”N 44°47’49.87”E
Elevation: 1360 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: CHL
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 322.

Code: 249

Site name: Kul
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38° 7’27.32”N 44°44’26.97”E
Elevation: 1430 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: NEO, IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 322.

Code: 250

Site name: Gosh
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38° 8’12.47”N 44° 45’15.50”E
Elevation: 1390 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: possible
Chronology: CHL, IA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: unknown
Literature: Kearton 1970: 322.

Code: 251

Site name: Tazashahr
Site type: tepe
Coordinates: 38°10’39.41”N 44°40’36.17”E
Elevation: 1470 m a.s.l.
Localisation reliability: certain
Chronology: MBA, LBA/EIA
Geographical position: open plain
State of preservation: partly damaged
Literature: Kearton 1970: 322.

The Analysis of Settlement Patterns in a Diachronic Perspective

In this paragraph, we have divided the archaeological sites selected for each individual chronological period. Overall, we analysed sites referable to 8 distinct chronological periods, of which 5 refer to the pre-protohistoric period (from the Neolithic to the Early Iron Age) and 3 refer to the historical period (from the Middle Iron Age to the Sasanian period). However, if the data have allowed us to analyse the development of the settlement pattern for the Prehistory and Protohistory in a continuous manner, for the historical period the data have only allowed us to attempt the reconstruction of the settlement systems for the Middle Iron Age and Late Iron Age, excluding the entire Hellenistic-Parthian phase due to the substantial absence of reliable data. A small batch of data is present regarding the Sasanian phase that is useful for developing considerations for the Late Antiquity period regarding Salmas.

Neolithic Period (10000-5200 BCE)[1]

The plain of Salmas is certainly an area in which an attempt has been made to contribute to the problems relating to the definition of the neolithisation processes in north-western Iran. This explains why among the few sites subject to archaeological analysis in the Salmas plain there are sites with important Neolithic levels, such as in the case of Ahrendjan Tappeh and Qara Tappeh (Figure. 3). Overall, from the selected materials, there are 5 sites that can be referred, in the current state of research, to this phase, 3 of which are located on the edge of the plain and 2 in a central position with respect to the flat area. Overall, these are archaeological hills whose dimensional consistency for the time cannot be proven and which almost certainly did not have a complex defence system. The placement of the sites, in fact, suggests a situation of very low and completely absent conflict, both between the plain's communities and with the communities of the immediately adjacent areas. As far as the material culture of this period is concerned, the reference sites for the definition of the chrono-typologies are Hajji Firuz, which gives its name to a Neolithic pottery class, i.e., the Hajji Firuz Ware, and the Hasanlu site, with reference to Level 10, a deep trench conducted within the tell. The Hajji Firuz Ware characterises the Neolithic sites of the Salmas plain area (Kroll 1994).

Chalcolithic Period (5200-3200 BCE)

A total of 8 archaeological sites have been identified for the Chalcolithic (Figure.4). The identification of these sites is based on a group of pottery known in the literature as Dalma Ware and Pisdeli Ware, names coming from the homonyms, which correspond to levels IX (full Chalcolithic) and VIII (late Chalcolithic) of Hasanlu. In addition, another group called Kul Tappeh-Marand Ware has been identified, which is currently little known. As regards the settlement pattern of this phase, we note a total discontinuity in cultural terms, symptomatic of profound changes in the needs of these communities. In fact, when compared to the Neolithic period, a single site, Ahrendjan Tappeh, demonstrates settlement continuity. Observing the territorial distribution of the sites, which are still mostly tappeh, probably without defensive systems, and mostly located in the centre of the Salmas plain, we note for the first time an initial manifestation of control over the road axes. It is no coincidence that the three sites located on the edge of the plain are in correspondence with what will be the three access points to Salmas in all ages: Kafir Qal'eh on the western edges, on the road that leads to the Zagros, of site SL8, located on the main road connecting Orumiyeh plain, and Tappeh Moghanjik on the road leading towards Khoy plain.

Early Bronze Age (3400-2600/2500 BCE)

With the Early Bronze Age, the complexity of the archaeological data seems to increase, and the consequences, in terms of material culture, of the establishment of trade routes with the neighbouring areas, with the southern Caucasus, begin to be traced. In fact, in the Early Bronze Age sites, there was a coexistence of ceramic productions of a local nature (Yanik Ware, Hasan Ali Ware, Painted Orange Ware) and the ingression of Kura-Araxes ceramics. Altogether, 10 archaeological sites referable to this period have been identified (Figure.5). As for the transition phase between the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic, there is a strong discontinuity with respect to the earlier phase, with only 2 sites used from the previous period (Gara and Moghanjik). This discontinuity manifests itself not so much in

[1]All dates reported in this contribution were taken from Matthews – Fazeli Nashli 2022.

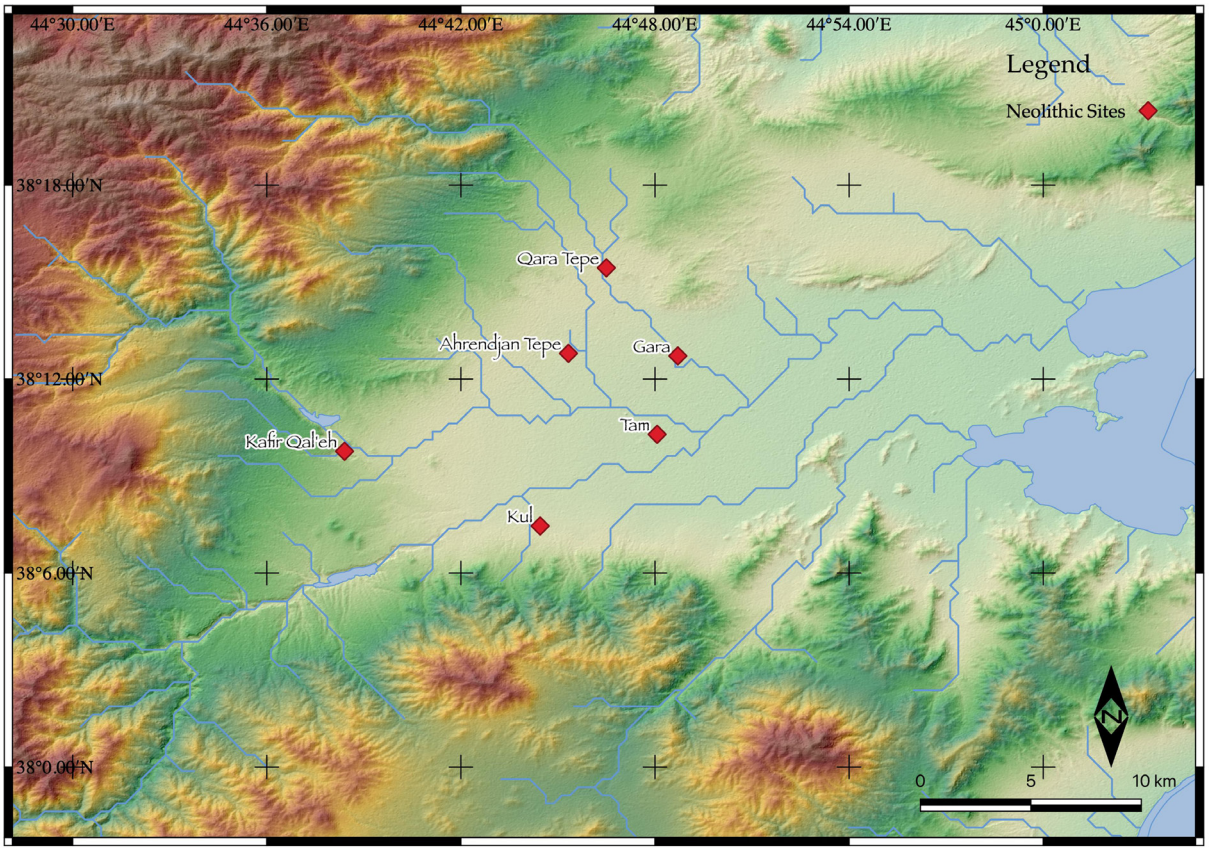


Figure. 3: *Distribution map of the Neolithic sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

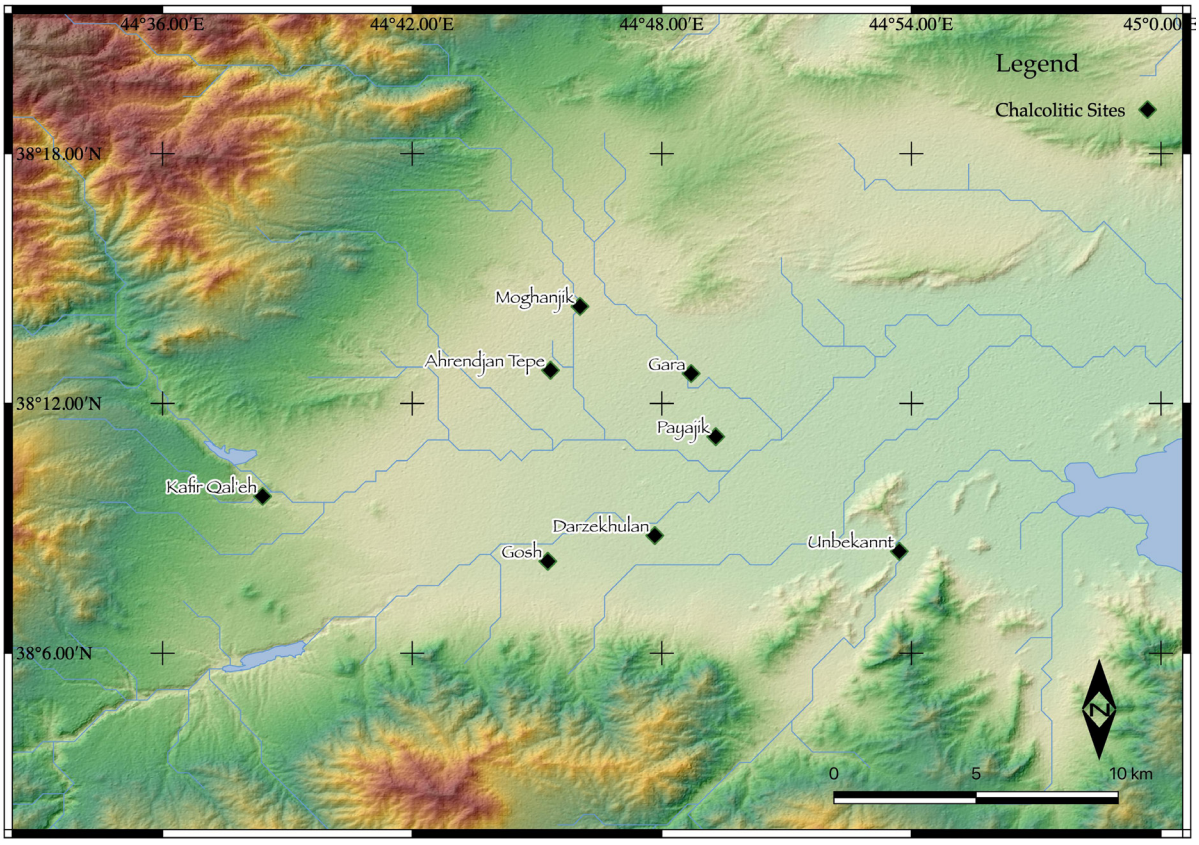


Figure. 4: *Distribution map of the Chalcolithic sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

the choice of differentiated areas as in the desire to move the sites to more defensible positions. The sites are equally divided between settlements located on the edge of the flat areas near those previously used in the Late Chalcolithic for the control of access routes. It is relevant to note, as evidence of the importance of the direction of movement, the presence of three close sites along the course of the Zola Chay River, functional to control the entrance to the plain from the west, and the reactivation of a site that had been established in the Neolithic, which is the site of Qara Tappeh. Access control from the south is instead entrusted to a new construction of this period, Qal'eh Vaziri, a fortified complex of critical importance for the control of the narrow valley leading to Orumiyeh, and which will remain in use until the Urartian period. This site, due to its topographical position and the probable presence of fortification complexes already in protohistoric times, can be considered one of the main and probably the oldest fortification complexes of the Salmas Plain, which further testifies to the precocity of the militarisation processes of these regions[1]. the most relevant element, together with these militarisation dynamics, for the Salmas plain and more generally for the north-western area of Iran is the contemporary "activation" of two of the main sites of the regional Protohistory, i.e., the site of Haftavan Tappeh, located exactly in the centre of the plain, and Qara Tappeh, located in its northern margins. The coexistence of these two sites means that the Salmas region can be considered one of the centres, if not the main centre, of the protohistoric period of the western coast of the Orumiyeh Basin. The lack of systematic excavations at most of the minor sites, as well as the presence of imposing post-Bronze Age phases at both Haftavan and Qara Tappeh, preclude establishing the existence of forms of hierarchy between the sites; however, given the developments the two contexts will have in the following period, it is possible to hypothesise that, already in the Early Bronze Age, Qara Tappeh and, especially, Haftavan Tappeh, had a role of great importance. Since Qal'eh Vaziri is the only fortified complex for this phase, a low level of control of the plain and above all of its western portion emerges from the use of the GIS, in particular from the viewshed analysis, while instead the fortress of Vaziri is devoid of visibility on the northern portion of the plain. Qal'eh Vaziri was not to be in charge of the plain itself, but only of the access route from the south coming from the plain of Orumiyeh.

Middle Bronze Age (2500-1500/1400 BCE)

For the Middle Bronze Age, the reference ceramic appears to be, unlike the Early Bronze Age, an exogenous element known as *Black on Red Ware* (BRW), which is none other than ceramic traditions from the southern Caucasus[2]. This situation was the result of the merging of Caucasian traditions with the pottery of the Mesopotamian alluvium known as Khabur Ware. This led to the birth of a polychrome ceramic known in the literature as Urmia Ware. For a variety of reasons, the Middle Bronze period is particularly important for Salmas. Firstly, 8 archaeological sites have been identified, which testify for the first time to a numerical contraction of the sites (Figure.6). This decrease, rather than an effective demographic decrease in the area, appears to relate to an increasingly accentuated hierarchisation of the sites. Haftavan Tappeh becomes a key site not only for the Salmas area but, probably, for the entire Orumiyeh region (Figure.7). This is suggested by the number of finds and the size of the site explored by C. Burney. Substantially, Haftavan, which is located right in the centre of the plain, has a couple of satellite sites to the north and south, which must have had an agricultural vocation, while all the other sites are decentralised at the entrance to the narrow intermountain valleys, connecting with all the guidelines mentioned above. Of fundamental importance is that the western and southern routes are controlled by fortified complexes, one of which, Qal'eh Vaziri, was already active in the Early Bronze Age and will remain control centres for the road axes until the Urartian period and, as in the case of Kafir Qal'eh, even later. An element of extraordinary importance is that of the 8 sites, 6 were already active in the Early Bronze Age. This testifies to a very strong continuity of the settlement pattern between the different periods, which places this region, for example, in discontinuity with many of the areas of the Southern Caucasus where, in the transition between the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age, there is an almost total change of the settlement pattern, with early and systematic forms of *incastellamento ante litteram* and the substantial complete abandonment of low-altitude settlements. This difference can be explained from a "political" point of view with a notable change

[1]For the reconstruction of the militarisation processes, see Dan – Cesaretti 2021a, Dan – Cesaretti 2022a.

[2] For the reconstruction of the Middle Bronze Age in the Orumiyeh area, see Dan – Cesaretti 2022b.

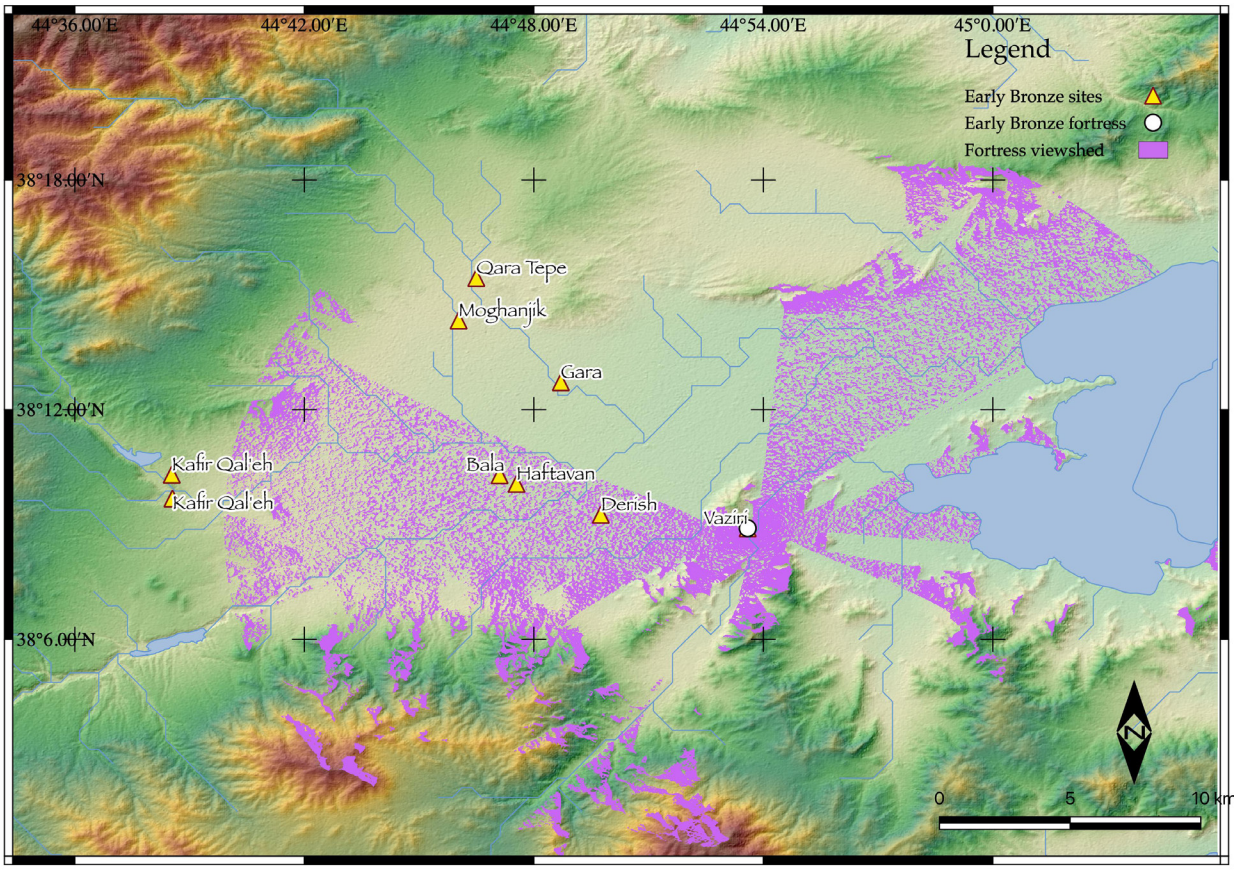


Figure. 5: *Distribution map and viewshed analysis of the Early Bronze Age sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

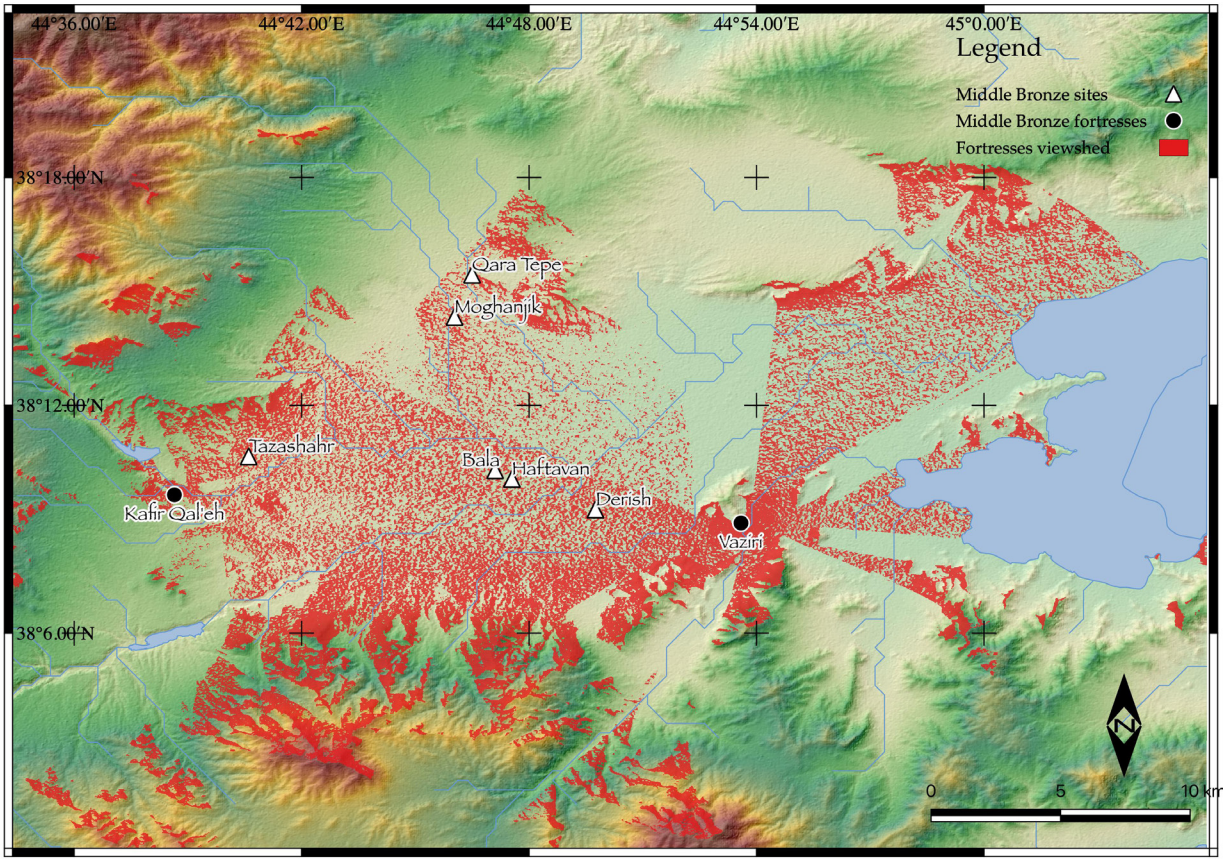


Figure. 6: *Distribution map and viewshed analysis of the Middle Bronze Age sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*



Figure. 7: *View of the central hill of Haftavan Tepe (Photo by R. Dan).*

in the scale of the military conflict, which is the result of the processes of settlement hierarchy and consequent shifting of the contact areas between the different communities further north, in this case, probably along the course of the Araxes river[1] . According to the viewshed analysis, the addition of the fortified centre of Kafir Qal'eh to the fortress of Qal'eh Vaziri indicates an intention to increase the level of control also over the plain, and in this case, Kafir Qal'eh also allows to control the sites in the northern portion, which were not subject to strict control during the Early Bronze Age, and, above all, access from the west is controlled with this site. In any case, the control over the plain is progressively increasing.

Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age (1500/1400-900 BCE)

For the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (Iron Age I–II), the material culture sees a problematic phase in terms of distinction given that ceramics are similar, unlike some metallurgical productions. This period is characterised by manifestations of continuity and reworking of ceramic productions and the development of new traditions, which will become characteristics of the grey-black pottery tipical of the period (*Gray Ware Horizon*). In the Early Iron Age, parallel to the *Gray Ware Horizon*, there are red-brown and grooved pottery productions. A total of 11 sites belonging to this period have been identified, 6 of which were already used in the Middle Bronze Age, a circumstance that would suggest an evident cultural continuity for this area (Figure.8). The most exemplary element of this process of continuity is that the centres of local elites remain located at Haftavan Tappeh and Qara Tappeh. In the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, there was a clear desire to further protect the approaches to the plain, especially from the west and south, as evidenced by the increase in the density of the sites in these areas. As in the Middle Bronze Age, the flat area of Salmas appears very sparsely settled, to the ever-greater advantage of the peripheral areas of the plain, with only two sites with a clear agricultural vocation, which must have been satellite sites of Haftavan Tappeh.

Middle Iron Age/ Urartu (900-700 BCE)

With Urartu, the plain of Salmas fully enters its historical phase, although no epigraphic documents have ever been found in this specific area. The beginning of the Urartian domination of the area, at least according to the epigraphic data available from other areas, allows us to date the

[1]Dan - Cesaretti 2022b. It is also particularly interesting to observe how in the Middle Bronze Age there is an ingression of exogenous pottery, the so-called Khabur Ware, coming from the territories of northern Mesopotamia and witnessing long-distance contacts perhaps connected with metallurgical transit routes. For this issue, see Hamlin 1971, Hamlin 1974, Dan *et al*. 2021.

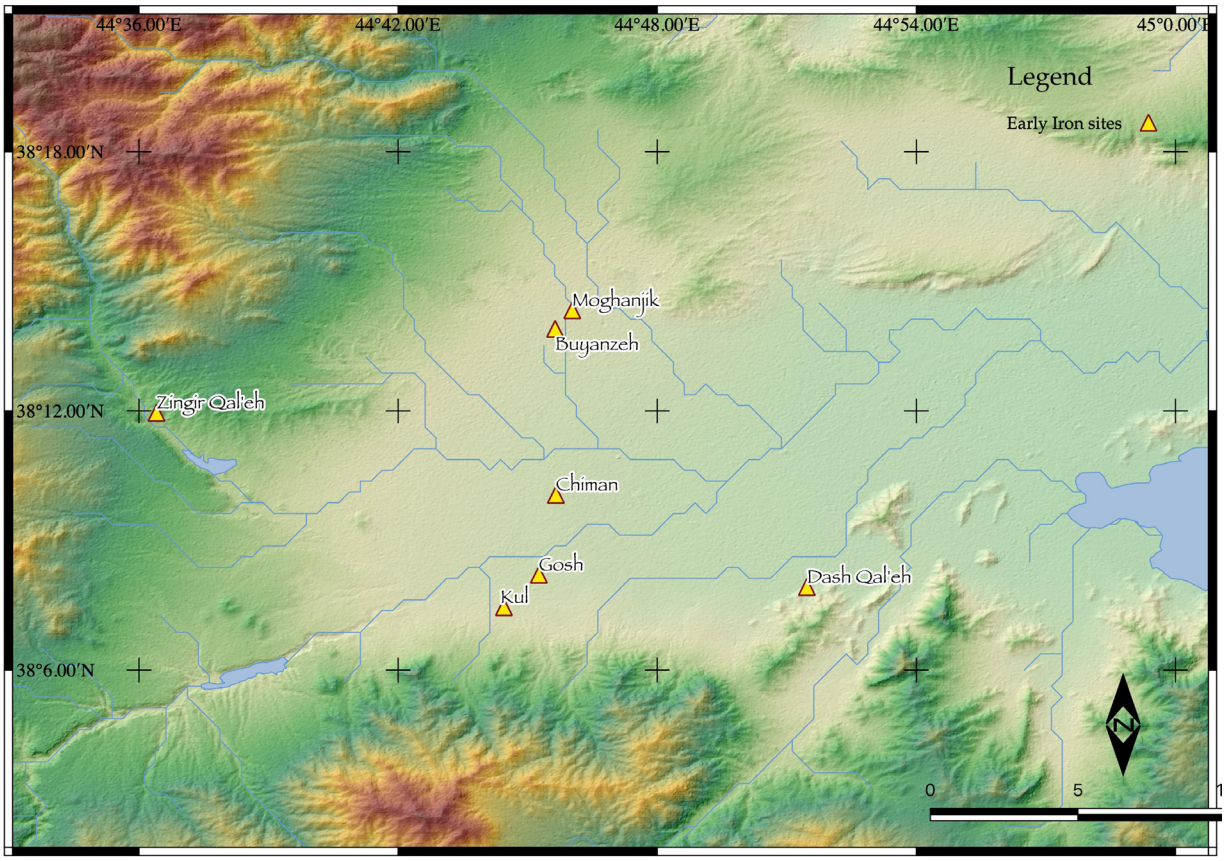


Figure. 8: *Distribution map of the Early Iron Age sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

conquest of this part of territory to the end of the 9th century BCE, in the years of the so-called co-regency between Išpuini, son of Sarduri, and his son Minua (820–810 BCE)[1]. Urartian control over this area lasted about a century as, because of Sargon II's 8th campaign, the Urartians withdrew from the shores of Lake Orumiyeh. It is probable that after a few decades of abandonment, the Urartians re-established ephemeral control over the Orumiyeh area and, therefore, over the Salmas plain. The proof of this situation is witnessed by the unfinished architectural project referable to Hasanlu, level IIIb, in which the fortified wall circuit is recognised on a morphological basis as an unfinished work of King Rusa (II), son of Argišti (first half of the 7th century BCE). At the current state of the research, the available data do not allow us to recognise unequivocal traces of architectural interventions or restorations referable to Rusa (II) for the Salmas plain[2]. From the point of view of archaeological data, 11 archaeological sites referable to Urartu or, more generally, to the Middle Iron Age are currently known (Figure. 9). In the Urartian period, there seems to be an apparent profound discontinuity because only five sites from the immediately preceding phase remain active even during Urartu, all sites of strategic importance (Haftavan, an important

[1]According to Assyrian sources from Sargon II's time, those referring to the 8th campaign, the region of the lake of Orumiyeh was very important to the Urartian royal dynasty. Sargon, in fact, mentions as he destroys the cities of Arbu, described as King Rusâ's ancestral city, and Riyar, described as Ištar-dūrī (Sarduri) place property (RINAP 2: 1,143-144; 6, 277). This information, which is of great importance since it connects the Urartian royal dynasty with the regions of Orumiyeh, does not allow one to trace which rulers Sargon specifically referred to. If the Rusa mentioned is almost certainly the Rusa against which the Assyrian ruler fought during the eighth campaign, there is even more uncertainty about the identity of the Sarduri, connected with the city of Rijar. If it was the Sarduri son of Lutipri, then this would mean that the region of Orumiyeh and perhaps also the plain of Salmas would have already been part of the Urartian possessions before the famous expedition of Išpuini and Minua, who established the Urartian protectorate over Muṣaṣir. The circumstance that, already at the time of Sarduri, son of Lutipri, the region of Salmas was already under Urartian control appears to be a very realistic hypothesis, above all in consideration of the depth and length of the campaign that will be conducted by his son and nephew.

[2] From the perspective of the pottery, S. Kroll recognizes some sites such as Pir Čavuš, Qal'eh Vaziri and Zingir Qal'eh as referable to this period (Kroll 1976: 168).

centre in all periods and the centres located on communication routes). These are mainly fortified complexes located on the edge of the plain and along the communication routes that, in some cases, exploit fortified places or centres of earlier periods, as in the case of Qal'eh Vaziri or Kafir Qal'eh; in other cases, they create new contexts, as in the case of Qal'eh Hodar, in the northern margins of the plain, along the road that leads to Khoy. The centre of Urartian power in this area remains unchanged from much of the Protohistory and is still Haftavan Tappeh, where excavations conducted by Burney have identified the remains of a palace probably used by the Urartian governor of the area (Figure. 10). The decision to use this site as a centre of power appears to be in profound discontinuity with the established Urartian settlement practise attested in many of the other areas under their control. In fact, Urartian control centres usually coincided with fortified palaces located in highly defensible positions on natural rocky spurs on the edge of the plains and often in correspondence with the access roads. In this regard, think of the sites of Qal'eh, Ismail Agha, or Bastam. The choice of Haftavan Tappeh is unusual since the site is objectively not very defensible as it is in the centre of the plain. The choice of this site may be connected to two factors: the first is the Urartian perception of the importance of the place and a desire to establish settlement continuity; the other is that the plain of Salmas had to be considered in the initial phase of the dynastic period as an area fully inserted in the political organisation of the Urartian state and, in any case, far from the frontiers. From this point of view, the case of Hasanlu is not comparable to that of Haftavan, although the topographical positions of the sites are similar, since the attempt to establish a site at Hasanlu is part of a new settlement strategy carried out by Rusa, son of Argišti, which did not find developments in the Urartian settlement pattern. This is also in consideration of the fact that Hasanlu is located outside the "traditional" limits of the Urartian expansion (Khanmohammadi *et al*. 2023). With the Urartian domination of the Salmas plain, settlements in the lowland area were completely absent for the first time since late Prehistory, except for Haftavan. The reason of this absence should not be interpreted as a lack of Urartian agricultural exploitation of flat areas, but rather as an invisibility related to our inability to recognize, from the perspective of material culture, the sites still active in the Middle Iron Age and already active in previous periods in which the markers of Urartian culture were not visible in terms of ceramics and architecture. In other words, most of the sites with an agricultural vocation active in the immediately preceding periods continued to be active in the Urartian period, but the dynamics of continuity in ceramic production made them substantially invisible. The G.I.S. also reveals the peak of control over the Salmas plain in this period, as demonstrated by the viewshed analysis, with significant and homogeneous coverage of the entire plain, and above all, for the first time, it is possible to reconstruct a clear control system and visual contact between the fortifications located to the east and west of the plain through the analysis of visibility. The creation of the Garny Yaruk site on high ground plays a decisive role in this control system, as visible from Figure. 9.

Late Iron Age/ Achaemenid Period (700-330 BCE)

In the post-Urartian period, there is apparently a significant decrease in the sites (only five) that have comparisons in the Salmas area only in numerical terms with the Neolithic (Figure.11). As for the Urartian period, it is very probable that most of the agricultural centres were still active from previous periods, but it is not possible to recognise them based on material culture. From a settlement standpoint, the 5 sites identified show almost total continuity with the Urartian era. In fact, 4 of the 5 sites directly exploit the remains of the Urartian period. The centre of power almost certainly remains Haftavan Tappeh, while all the other centres are exclusively located near the road axes. The only discontinuity with the Urartian period concerns the northern limits of the Salmas plain, where Qal'eh Hodar is apparently abandoned in favour of the reuse of the large protohistoric centre of Qara Tappeh. In terms of material culture, the only pottery classes that are recognisable and recognised as diagnostic are *Triangle/Ardabîl Ware* and an even more local production known as *Halaqu Ware* (Dan – Cesaretti 2021b: 1-15). The pottery known as Triangle Was was used by the ruling elites in these regions, who are descended from Urartian power. As in many other areas, even those not too far from the centre of Achaemenid power, there is no unequivocal evidence of the imperial presence in this region, which had to have been managed with forms of "indirect" control by the Persian elite.

Sasanian Period (224-651 AD)

For the plain of Salmas, there is a strong hiatus in the archaeological documentation between the end of the Iron Age and Late Antiquity. Between the end of the Achaemenid period and the beginning of the Sasanian Empire, we do not have adequate knowledge of the archaeological markers to be able to hypothesise anything regarding the plain of Salmas. The last pre-Islamic period for which we have data is the phase in which Salmas was inserted within the Sasanian Empire. Even if these data are rather scarce in numerical terms, they are nonetheless very significant. Of the three sites currently known, two correspond to Haftavan Tappeh and Qara Tappeh, which have been confirmed throughout history as centres of local power. These are in fact the only two sites where ceramic evidence attributable to the Sasanian period has been found, testifying that these were the centres responsible for interacting with the elites of the Sasanian empire. Certainly, the most extraordinary element is the presence of a royal Sasanian relief in which the first kings of the dynasty, Ardashir I and Shapur I, should be depicted at Khantakh (Figures.12–14). The captives represented are like the representations of King Khosrow of Armenia and his vizier, and if this interpretation is correct, the relief would date to 241 AD, when Shapur I succeeded his father[1] . An alternative proposal sees in the relief a depiction of a peace between the Sasanians and the Armenians (Shavarebi 2014: 129). Despite the paucity of sites, the plain of Salmas certainly played an important role in the economy of the Sasanian Empire, as evidenced by the presence of the relief outside the Sasanian earthland and by the fact that, before the revolution, the plain was known by the name of the Sasanian king Shapur in connection with the relief. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that this relief is the northernmost currently known as regards the Sasanian world and in some way also constitutes the limit of what could be considered the earthland of the Sasanian Empire.

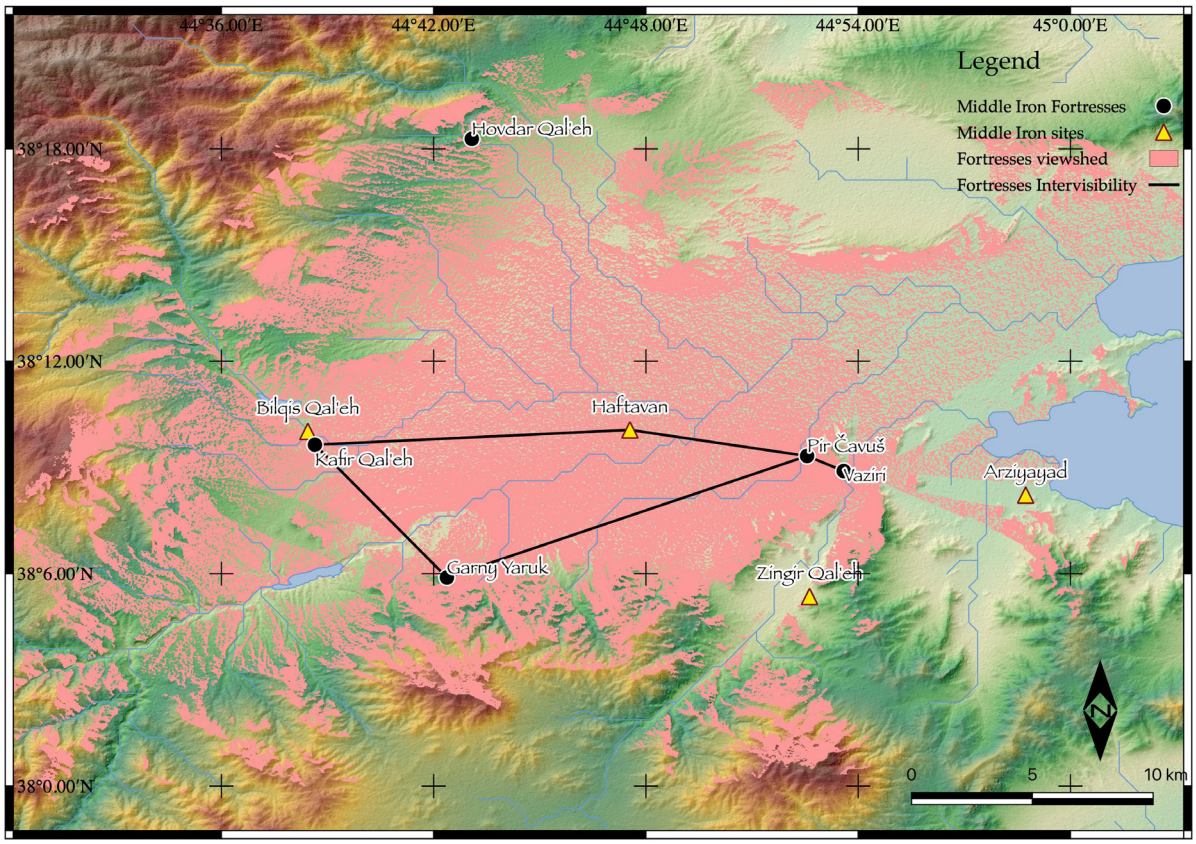


Figure. 9: *Distribution map and viewshed analysis of the Middle Iron Age sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*

[1]Vanden Berghe 1984. On the specific relief of Salmas, see Hinz 1965: 148.



Figure. 10: *Remnants of Urartian structures on top of Haftavan Tappeh. In the background one of the deep trenches dug by Butamin (Photo by R. Dan).*

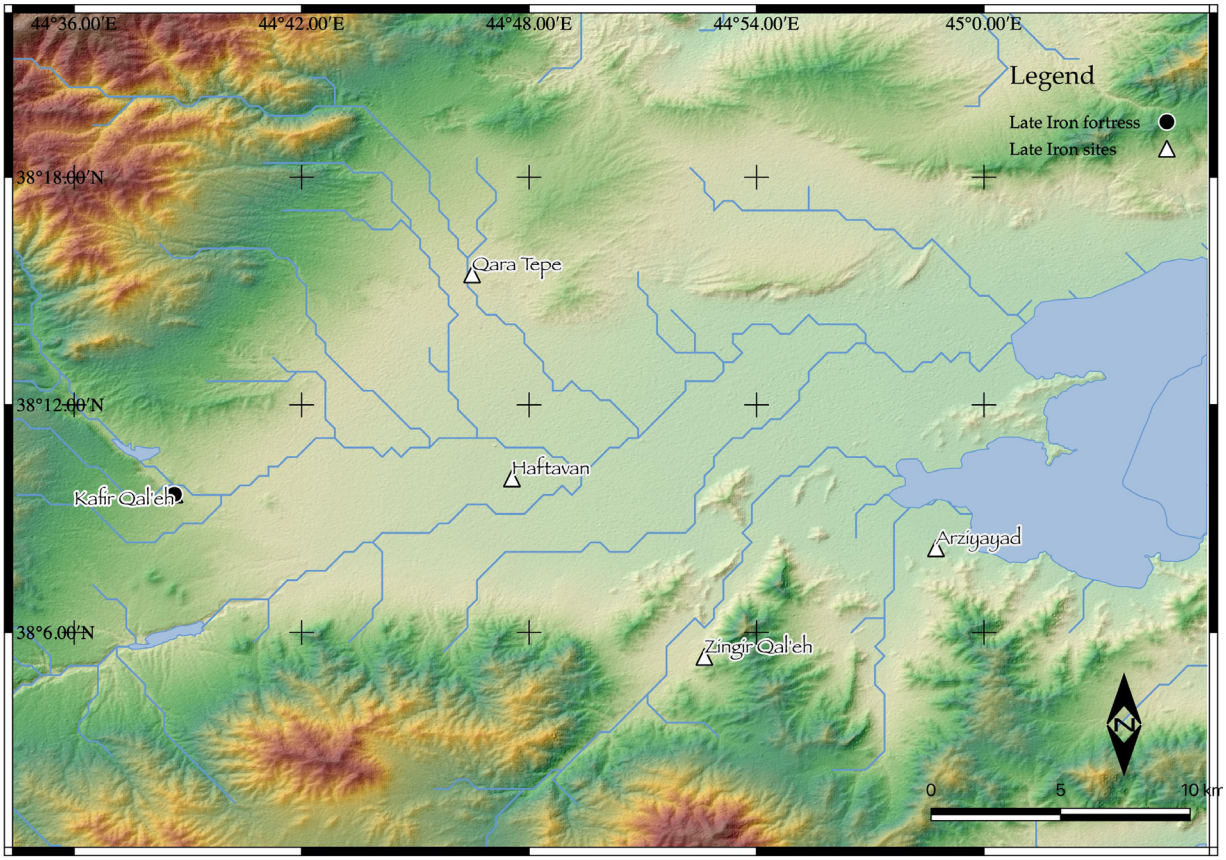


Figure. 11: *Distribution map of the Late Iron Age sites of the Salmas plain (G.I.S. map by D. Salaris).*



Figure. 12: *View of the rock outcrop with the Sasanian relief in Khantakh (Photo by R. Dan).*



Figure. 13: *The Khantakh relief (Photo by R. Dan).*

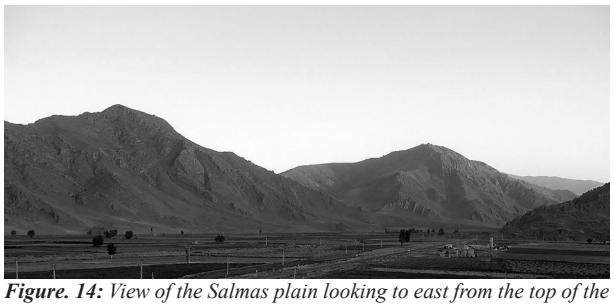


Figure. 14: *View of the Salmas plain looking to east from the top of the Khantakh rock outcrop (Photo by R. Dan).*

Conclusions

The Salmas plain is certainly an area of great interest, both from a geographical perspective and from a historical point of view, as it is located at the crossroads of some of the main routes connecting the Araxes valley and the Iranian plateau itself. Despite its rather small size, this centrality is also confirmed by the nature and consistency of some of the archaeological sites identified therein. This circumstance is evident even though the archaeological data currently in our possession is largely fragmentary and necessary for future and further verifications. From the perspective of its importance in the settlement patterns of the pre-Islamic period, the Salmas plain would seem to have experienced a pre-protohistoric phase of great importance and a later phase between the Urartian occupation and the Sasanian period that saw a progressive marginalisation of this area. To testify to this situation, it will be enough to mention the presence in the protohistoric period of two very important archaeological sites such as Haftavan Tappeh and Qara Tappeh, which are among the most important in the entire north-west of Iran for the periods between the Chalcolithic and the Middle Bronze Age. A first peak in the Protohistory of the Salmas Plain is probably reached in the Middle Bronze Age, when the site of Haftavan Tappeh is recognised as the most important site for the period in the region. It probably must have been at the top of a system of management and control of the territory, which is still largely unexplored. In the pre-Islamic historical period, on the other hand, the most important moment, which can be reconstructed thanks to archaeological data, is certainly the Urartian period, during which the plain was equipped with a rather capillary network of fortified centres largely characterized by intervisibility between them, and which, to control the plain itself and therefore the agricultural activities that took place there, also controlled the multiple accesses to the plain from the south, west, and north. It is probably no coincidence that the economic and administrative centre of the plain remained located in Haftavan Tappeh, in a situation where the remains of a small building from the time have been found. The Urartian's decision to centre power in a plain devoid of natural defences can only be explained by a desire to keep the centre of power in continuity with a site that was already recognised as primary in the area at the time. The slow and progressive dissolution of Urartian control, which is replaced by a series of local potentates who will find themselves interacting over time with a series of imperial entities of various natures and durations, essentially sees the area of Salmas become progressively less relevant. This circumstance constitutes a well-known situation in most territories under the control of the Empires related to an archaeological invisibility that is strictly connected to processes

of continuity. The relations between the imperial power and the local monarchs have an impact that is substantially visible at the top of the chain of command while having an almost non-existent impact on the territory. In Salmas, the situation is not different from other regions, for example, in the Achaemenid period, when a pottery tradition known as Triangle Ware spreads and was recently identified as a marker of the local elites in the Achaemenid period. From an archaeological standpoint, the invisibility is provided by a systematic use of pre-existing protohistoric and Urartian archaeological sites, a circumstance that, when combined with the continuity of ceramic productions that appear local, makes it nearly impossible to recognise vestiges and materials from the post-Achaemenid period up to and including the Sasanian period.

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