

## Liār-Sang-Bon: Evidence of a Parthian Cemetery on the North Flank of the Central Alborz, Iran, Amalsh

Vali Jahani<sup>※</sup>

※ Gilan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Directorate

As a dependency of Amlash County of Gilan Province (Fig. 1), the archaeological complex of Liār-Sang-Bon (36°54'01" N, 50°01'46" E) is a vast site about 27 hectares in area, lying at an elevation about 1900 m asl (Fig. 2, 3). First identified in 2012, the complex was subjected to test excavations in 2014 in an attempt to define its boundaries through opening 21 test pits. The work resulted in the identification of a cemetery with material culture dating to the Parthian, and occasionally, Sassanian periods, and a settlement as well as scattered remains from the later occupations of the early and middle Islamic centuries. The ancient cemetery is in the eastern quarter of the complex on a 20 degree slope. In the first season, two pit type graves were uncovered in one of the trenches (Jahani 2014). Prompted by the illegal excavations and the prospective obliteration of the site, the second season of the fieldwork was carried out in 2016, focusing on the burial ground. Some 24 burials of crypt and pit types were recorded in 7 Trenches (Jahani 2016). The third season, again having the cemetery as its starting point, yielded further 24 catacomb and pit graves as well as a single jar burial (Jahani 2017).

As a result mortuary traditions, namely the pit graves, catacombs, and jar burials (Fig. 4), have been recorded at the ancient cemetery of Liār-Sang-Bon. The instances find parallels at a couple of sites in Gilan (Babak Rad 1966; Egami et al. 1966; Sono and Fukai 1968; Fukai and Matsutani 1980; Khalatbari 1989) and a solitary site in the vicinity of Sari in Mazandaran province (Sharifi 2015). The currently available evidence indicates that the most common burial tradition in Gilan at sites such as Roudbar and Deylaman in the Parthian period was to bury in the catacomb graves, and that the tradition is so far unattested in the preceding periods. Hence, many scholars credit Central Asia with the origination of the tradition (Sulimirski 2011, 101–102), though little can

be said on the exact direction through which the culture entered the southern Caspian littoral. While attested in the Elamite period of the mid-2nd millennium BC, the jar burial practice reached its highest point of popularity in the Parthian period. Related burials occur in several regions within and outside the boundaries of present-day Iran (Sono and Fukai 1968; Khalatbari 2005), with the geographically closest instance being Germe in the Moghan Plain (Kambakhshfard 1967). There are indications that suggest this particular funerary practice probably reflects religious and ritual influences of the Iranian plateau's inhabitants upon cultures that flourished in the region contemporary with the Parthian period.

The pottery assemblage collected from these burials generally tend to show a light to dark or smoke-blackened brown paste. Examples in a reddish brown, orange, black or buff paste also occur. Morphologically, they come in such shapes as various bowls, jars, teapots (spouted vessels), cups, and a rhyton. The excavated vessels are comparable to the materials in a number of nearby or far-lying assemblages (Egami et al. 1966, pl. XXXIX/12; Sono and Fukai 1968, 42, 61–62, pl. XLV/1; Fukai and Ikeda 1971, 22–23; Haerinck 1977, 172; Khalatbari 2004, 96–105), and datable to a time period spanning the 3rd century BC and the 3rd century AD (Fig. 5).

The assemblage of personal ornaments consists of an assortment of beads, pendants, finger rings, bracelets, and hairpins, which on typological basis can be assigned a date between ca. 2nd century BC- 3rd century AD (Marshall 1970, 99–112; Schmidt 1957; Sono and Fukai 1968, pls. LXXXV/34–36; XLVII/4a-b; Haerinck et al. 1991; Spaer 1993) (Figs. 6–7).

The excavated weaponry includes swords or daggers, some with a T-shaped haft, knives, spearheads, and arrowheads. For the most part, they lack any typological

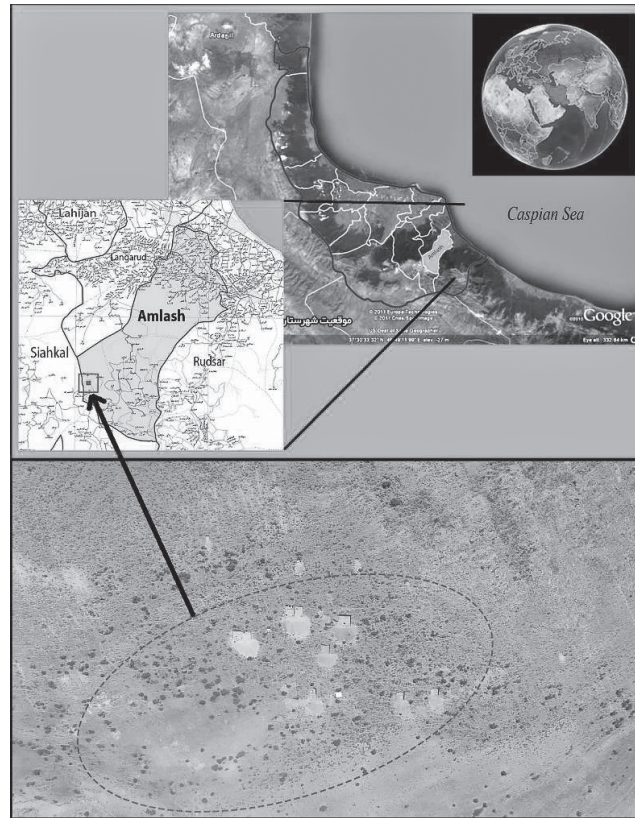


Fig.1 Liār-Sang-Bon: general location of the site, topography and the approximate extent of the cemetery.

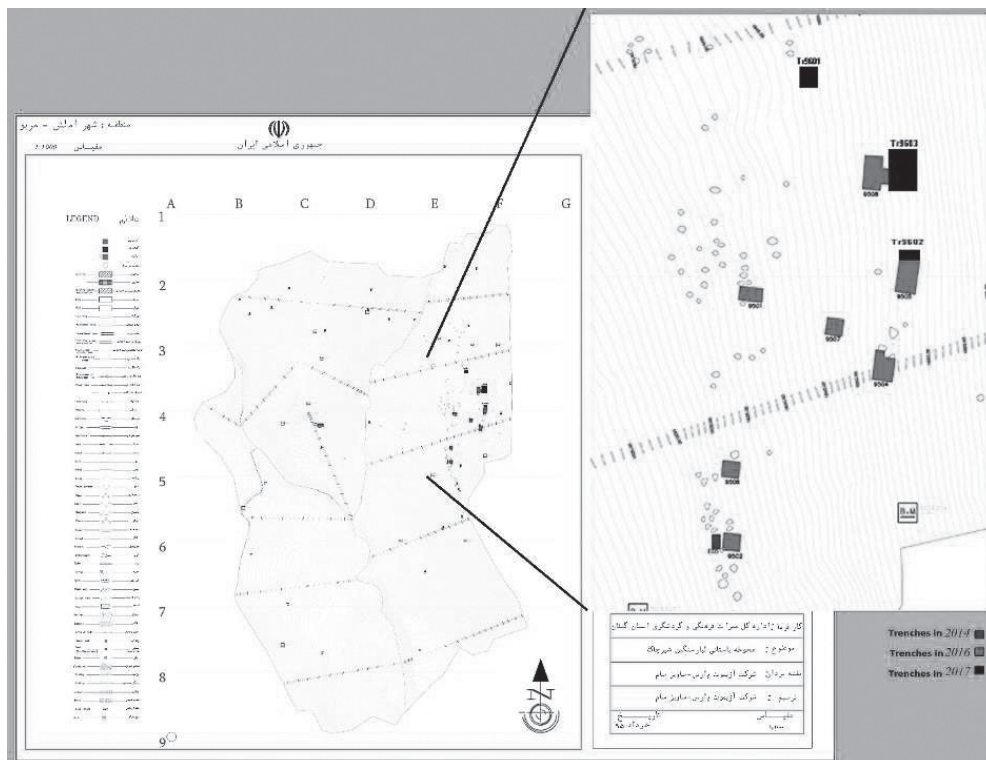


Fig.2 Liār-Sang-Bon: topographic map of the buffer zone and location of the trenches.



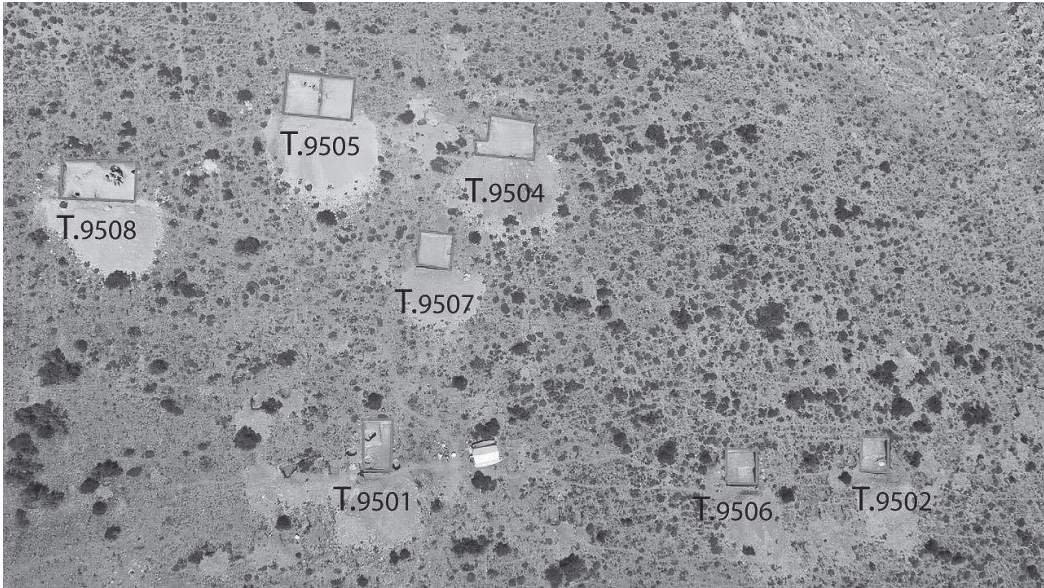


Fig. 3 Liār-Sang-Bon: Position trenches excavated

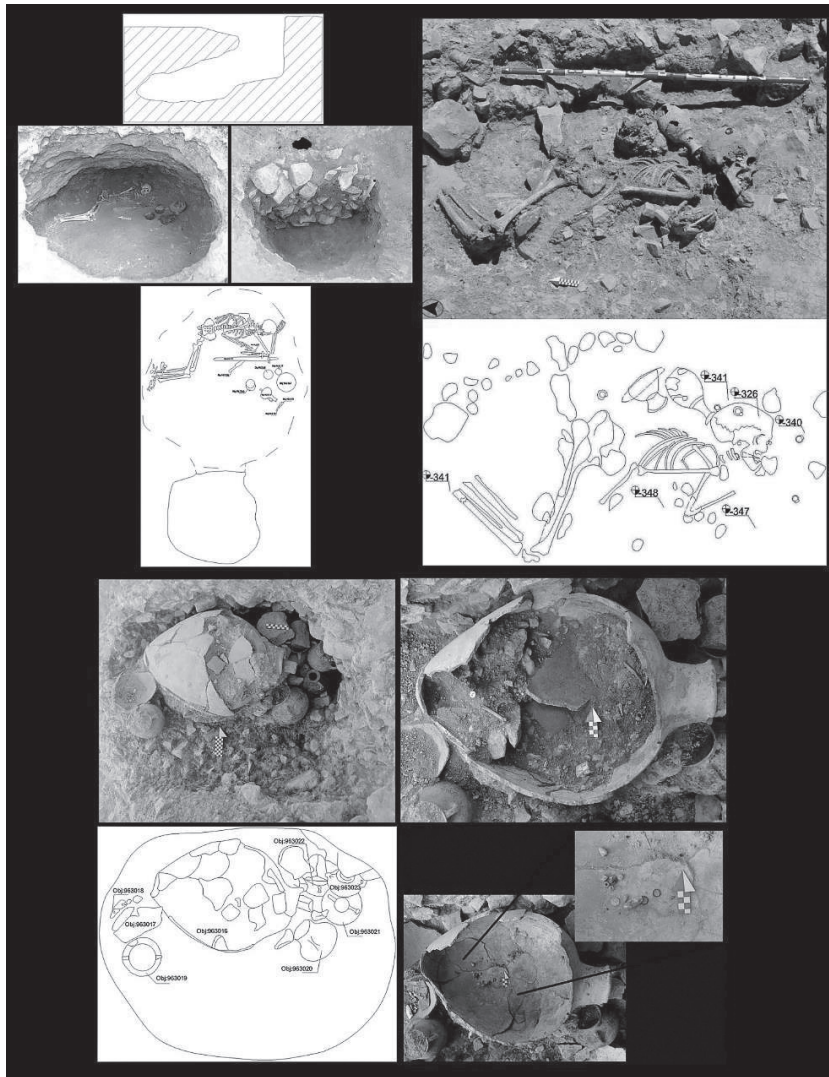


Fig.4 Liār-Sang-Bon: one of the pit graves, catacombs and jar-burials at the cemetery.





Fig.5 Liār-Sang-Bon: some of the potsherds, glass vessels and weapons.

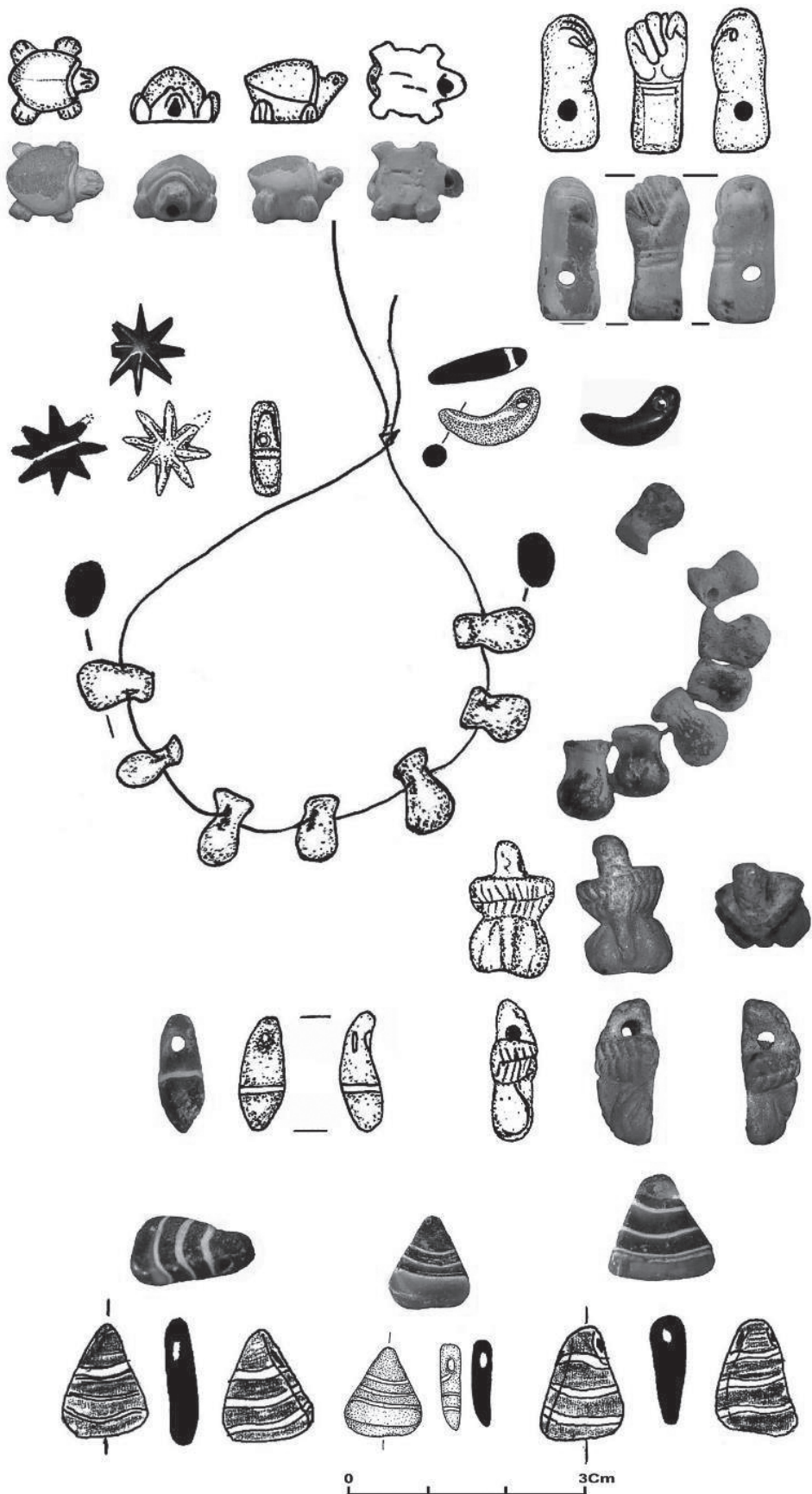


Fig.6 Liär-Sang-Bon: some of the pendants.

characteristics to help suggest a relative chronology.

Among the remarkable intriguing finds from the cemetery are glass vessels, beads with “eye” decorative patterns, beads in the form of a fist and tortoise, phallus-shaped pendant, a plaque-shaped glass pendant with the figure of Harpocrates, and an inscribed finger ring bearing the designation “ROSA.”

Interdisciplinary studies such as physical anthropological, archaeogenetic, and archaeoparasitological analyses are also underway. Results of these analyses alongside those of the samples sent for absolute dating will hopefully bring to light some

socio-cultural and subsistence and economic aspects of this ancient community.

### Acknowledgement

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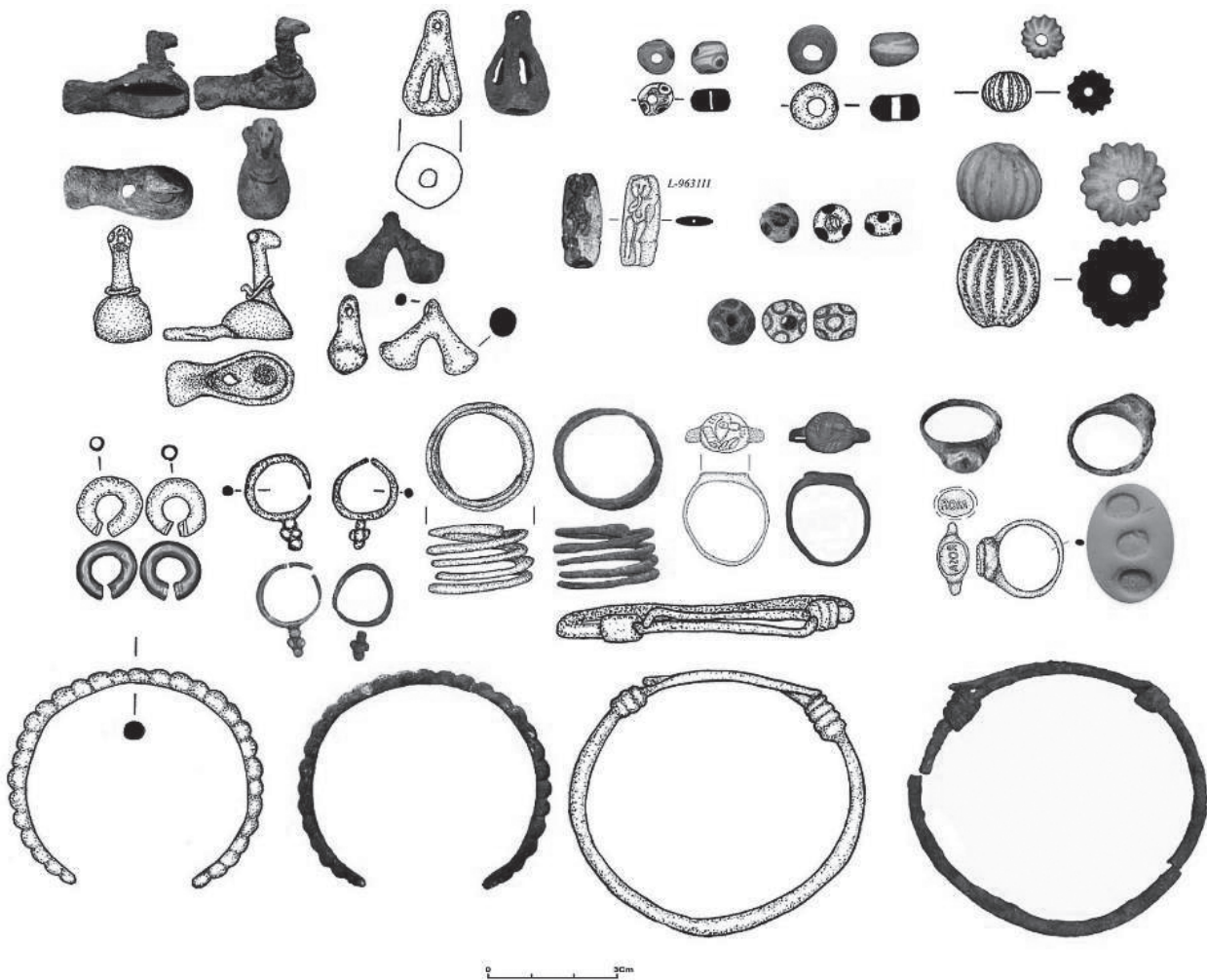


Fig.7 Liār-Sang-Bon: some of other objects.



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