

A Study of Parthian Settlements of Northern Basin of Qizil Uzan in Vicinity of Upper Tarom, Zanjan-Iran

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Abstract: *Upper Tarom Valley is located in the northern regions of Zanjan province, between two mountain ranges parallel to Alborz. The Qizil Uzan river flows from northwest to southeast, from amid the valley. Considering some particular geographical and geomorphological features of the region, as a micro-climate, archaeological studies of the region are of extra importance. An extensive systematic survey which has been carried out within the boundaries of Ab Bar and Darraim rural districts – located in the Central District of Tarom County, the north side of Qizil Uzan- led to the identification of 39 archaeological sites, in 12 of which cultural traces of Parthian period had been discovered. Preliminary study of Parthian considered areas indicates persistent settlement during Parthian period. Furthermore, the 20 hectares area of Darraim castle shows the key role of the surveyed area in late centuries of Parthian rule. Scrutinizing the Parthian pottery in the area also shows that the area's pottery has been influenced by the pottery of north, northwest and west of Iran, as well as its' own endogenous characteristics. Due to the environmental patterns of the settlement in the area, it seems that most of the population had lived by agricultural and horticultural occupations.*

Keywords: *Qizil Uzan – Upper Tarom – Zanjan Province – Parthian Areas – Parthian Pottery*

Introduction

The Qizil Uzan is one of the most vital rivers of Iran and has been playing an important role in attracting human population to live here. Its headwaters are located in southern mountains of Zanjan and Northern heights of Kurdistan province. The river flows across the East Azerbaijan province and Ardabil province, from where it crosses the Upper Tarom Valley, which is bounded by two mountain ranges parallel to Alborz.

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Neighboring locations to Upper Tarom County (area: 2235 km²) are Ardabil in north, Gilan and Qazvin provinces in east and northeast, Abhar town in south and Zanjan city in west. The county is located at 49 degrees 15 minutes to 48 degrees 30 minutes east of the Greenwich meridian and 37 degrees 01 minutes to 36 degrees 40 minutes north of the equator. This study has covered the northern areas of the county, including the entire area of Abbar and Darraim rural districts. The districts are surrounded by Ardabil province, Gilan province, Gilvan rural district, Qizil Uzan from north, northeast, east, south and southeast, respectively. (Fig1)

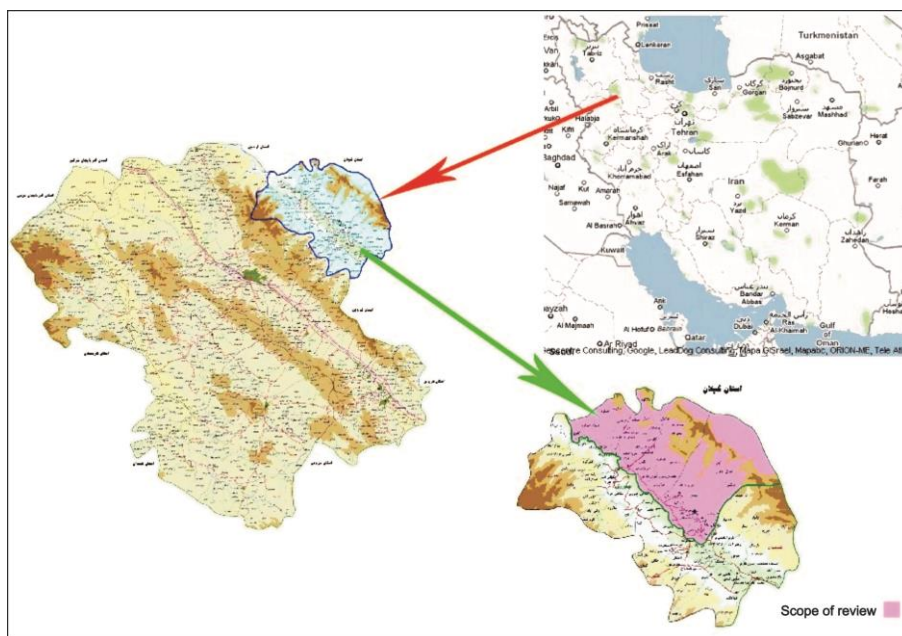


Fig 1: Location of the study area

Natural and environmental characteristics of the study area

The information in hand relating to geology of Upper Tarom County is mostly important, from archeological aspects, because of the non-existence of Precambrian and Paleozoic illuviation. The county majorly consists of volcanic, third age and quaternary deposits, while Neogene formations in the form of conglomerate, crag and shale layers, as well as thin layers of creta, are extensively situated too. The mentioned formations are located on top of the quaternary formations (e.g. alluvial terraces and numerous alluvial fans which end up in Qizil Uzan).

The weather conditions of Tarom County are mostly influenced by Arctic, Mediterranean, Black Sea and Caspian Sea air masses. Mountain ranges are situated in a way that work like a rampart opposing to the weather fronts. Therefore, the county is a less precipitated area comparing to its close

areas. Despite its relatively smaller area, the county has a diverse climate. Tarom Valley is known for its hot summer and moderate winter. The surrounding heights are extremely cold in winter and moderately hot in summer. The vegetation of the area ranges from grasslands and protected forests to wath forests. Considering its varied altitude and climate diversity, the valley has a diverse ecology altogether. Four types of ecosystems are noticeable in the region: mountain ecosystem, forest ecosystem, steppe grassland and wetland ecosystem. Horticultural products of the Upper Tarom County are juniper, olive, pomegranate, fig, hazel, grape and plum, while the wheat, barley, rice, as well as cucurbits are among the most frequent agricultural products.

Archeologic Investigations

The archeologic studies concerning the region, due to the distinct geographic and morphologic situation, as micro climate, are of high importance. The study observed an overall 39 archeologic sites; Considering the artifacts in the area, the sites suggestively belong to copper to late Islamic ages, 2, 16, 4, 19 of which are respectively assumed to relate to Bronze and Chalcolithic, Iron, Sassanid and Islamic ages. 12 sites are considered as being Parthian. It is obvious that some of these investigated sites consist of the remains of multiple ages.

Parthian investigated sites are majorly classified into 3 groups, as follows:

1. Mounds, mostly natural and alluvial, containing cultural deposits that have one meter or higher thickness;
2. Surface sites, probable graves and settlements with less than one-meter thickness
3. The Darram Castle, which could not be firmly assumed as a Parthian castle

GovarQale2 and GovarGhale 3, Upper Kuhkan, OghlanQalasi, Foqlake 1 and 2, PavahRud are all single period sites that contain Parthian artifacts (mostly earthenware) only. Sharfan Darreh is a site where Parthian, Sassanian and Islamic pottery could be found. The earthenware found in Dam site belongs to Parthian, as well as Islamic period. Furthermore, the surrounding area of Darram Castle contains the remnants of a castle also, the earthenware which are related to Iron Age and Parthian, Sassanian and Islamic periods. GovarQale1 on which the architectural features are obvious, contains artifacts from Iron Age and Parthian, Sassanian and Islamic periods, too. Finally, at the Emamzadeh VaznehSar site, Iron Age and Parthian, Sassanian and Islamic-related earthenware were identified. Meanwhile, in the site of the Emamzadeh VaznehSar were two pieces of thick red mud enamel pottery, with glossy surface and no decorations, comparable to the

polished red pottery of Godin III, IV, V¹, which showed that it is related to the Bronze age.

The Dam site with altitude of 1288 meters above sea level, is the highest site of the area and the OghlanQalasi with an altitude of 408 meters is the lowest in the area. Average altitude of the Parthian sites is 697 meters above sea level.

Environmental features and their role in attracting Parthian settlements

The role of climate and ecological environment in the dispersal of the ancient sites is important and undeniable. Factors including water resources, height above sea level and its relation to the geographical latitude, slope, the constituents of the soil, the climate of the area are key factors in absorbing human communities.

Throughout the human life, water has been among the most essential needs of mankind. Whether in past or present, water supply and access to secure water resources have been playing a key role in forming man-made settlements². As mentioned earlier, in the study area, in addition to Qizil Uzan and underground water resources like wells and qanats, there are several distributaries and torrents which altogether increase the attraction of human communities.

As it is visible in locating Parthian sites on the map (Fig. 2), 9 sites are situated in vicinity (within 300 meters) of the Abbar, SiahRud, PavahRud and VaznehSar distributaries. 2 sites are located in the northern terrace of Qizil Uzan (within less than 10 meters). It is only SharfanDarreh site that is relatively distant to water (within 700 meters from Abbar). On the other hand, 9 investigated sites are located below 700 meters above sea level. Therefore, the slope of the mentioned sites is less than 10 degrees. 3 sites have an altitude between 900 to 1300 meters above sea level which makes the 20 to 30 degrees slope reasonable.

The before mentioned 9 sites, with an average area of 3.3 hectares, are formed on alluvial plains. Due to easy access to various water resources and ideal soil quality, agricultural and horticultural activities are well conditioned. Meanwhile, the sites above 900 meters altitude, with an average area of 0.79 hectares, are situated in valleys

¹Frank Hole, *Archeology of Western Iran*, translated by Zahra Basti, Samt Publication, 2003, p. 416-419.

² Abbas Motarjem and Behzad Belmaki, *Investigation and Analysis of Parthian Settlements of the North Alvand Slopes (Hamadan)*, Journal of Archeology Studies, No.1, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran, 2009.

and sloped lands in vicinity of distributaries which makes them suitable for graziery. As the size and the aggregation of the sites is revealing the population living in the region, it is implacable that the prevailing economic pattern of Parthian period had been agriculture and horticulture.

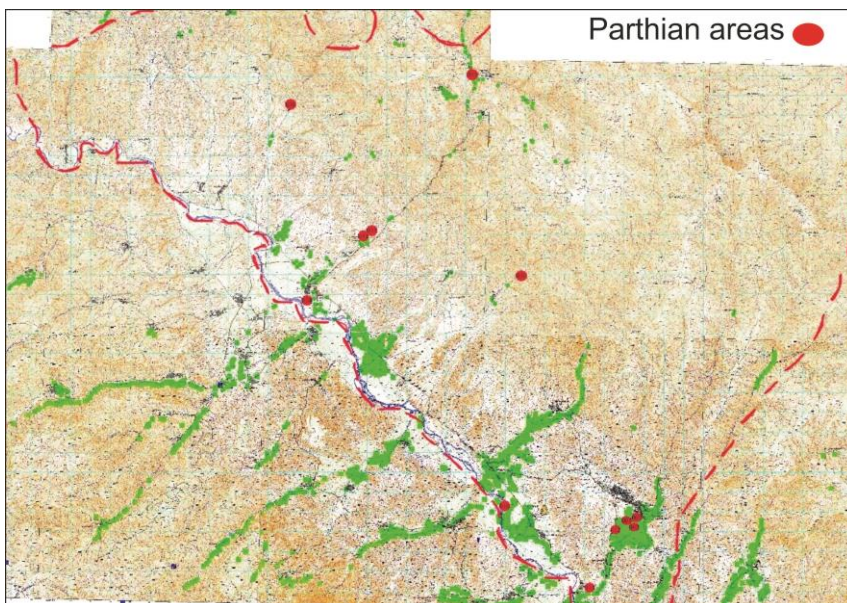


Fig 2: The location of Parthian areas

Among the identified sites, Darram Castle, with an area of 20 hectares, grounds on the northern coast of Qizil Uzan and south of the Darram village. This site is a large settlement of which the most significant structure is a castle. The southern side of the castle, which is 6 meters high from the riverbed of Qizil Uzan, is opposing the river. The southern front of the castle, because of the steep slope and the river as well, is perfectly protected. Most of the castle walls are still existing and their height reaches above 3 meters in some spots. There are 3 circular adobe towers in each northern and southern wall, among which the northwestern tower has remained the safest. The latter has a diameter of 4 meters and current height of more than 4 meters. The foundation of the walls is basically consisted of river rocks which is followed by bricks. At some points, walls are built using the same river rocks. Some walls are constructed with clay and, again, river rocks. At the northern side of the castle, a drainage, as well as architectural structures are observable. At 2 non-authorized excavation sites, there are many pieces of potteries which were used to conserve rations.

The vastest lands of the study area are located in the northern coast of Qizil Uzan, adjacent to Darram Castle site, and, in the eastern and northwestern side of it. From the aspect of water supply, the mentioned lands are favorably situated, considering Siah Rud at north and Qizil Uzan at west (2nd fig). These lands have been among the finest agricultural grounds and are still being used to produce the grains for local purposes. This is considered as an important privilege which, in addition to the vastness of the Darram Castle site, increases the significance of the area during the ancient ages.

Given that this area has not been excavated, and the exact date of the castle's structure is not known, it is not certain that the castle can be considered Parthian. However, the materials used in the foundation of the building are comparable to the remnants of the Parthian architecture of the Jalalieh Rostam-Abad mound and some bricks found in the walls of towers of the Darram Castle, with dimensions 38 x 10 x 38 cm, are comparable to those used in Jalalieh and Qeshlaq Mah Neshan Castle³.

Parthian pottery in the study area

In a general and preliminary classification, the Parthian pottery of the study area can be divided into three groups of decorated pottery, plain pottery, and so-called fillide pottery, which are described below. (Fig. 3,4,5)

Decorated Pottery (Fig 3): These potteries found in three areas of Pavah Rud, Dam and Emamzadeh Vazneh Sar, have similarities with those of East Azerbaijan Province, detailed in the Parthian Pottery written by Herink, dating from the third and second centuries BC⁴. These potteries are specified with beige-goldenrod surface, sufficient firing temperature and dense dough, rough large geometric decorations which are mostly colored red and brown. The mentioned potteries are comparable with those of East Azerbaijan Province, Khezerloo Castle archaeologic site⁵ and Behistun.⁶

³Abolfazl Ali and Alireza Khosroozadeh, *Gheshlagh Castle of the Parthian Large Enclosure in Mahnesan City of Zanjan*, Archaeological Researches, No. 3, Tarbiat Modares University, 2010.

⁴ Ernie Herink, *Iran's Earthenware in Parthian Period*, translated by Hamideh Chubak, Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran (Research Institute), 1977.

⁵Mohammad Feizkhah, *Triangular Dishes*, Archaeological Reports (3), Institute of Archeology of Iran Cultural Heritage Organization, 2004.

⁶Sajjad Ali Beygi, *Resumption of Archaeological researches in the Party Bisotun Area*, Journal of Modares Archaeological Research, Volume 2, Number 3, 2010, p. 50.

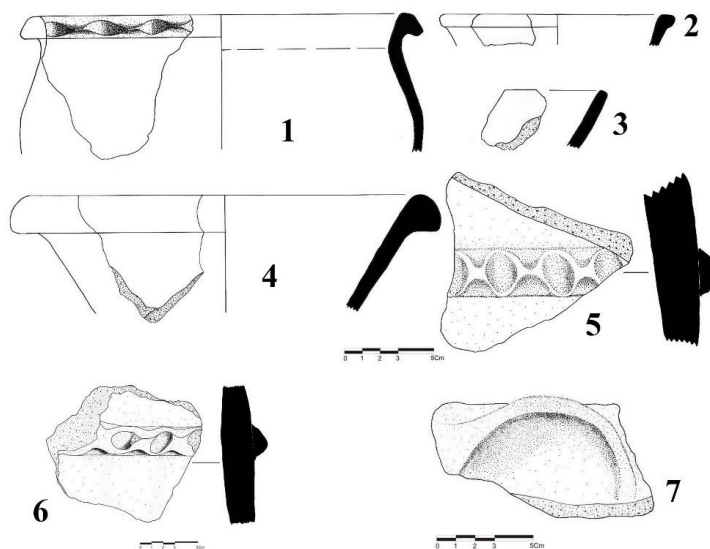


Fig 3: Decoration of Fillide Potteries

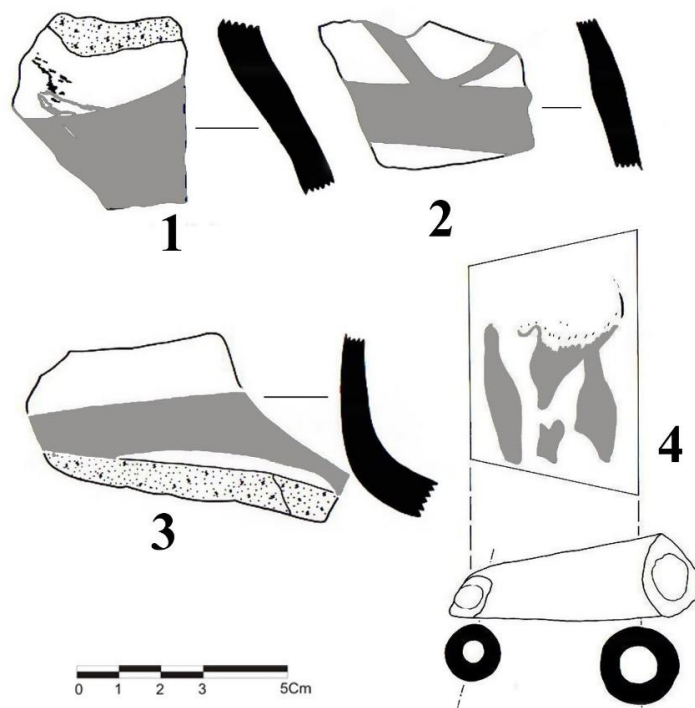


Fig 4: Decoration potteries

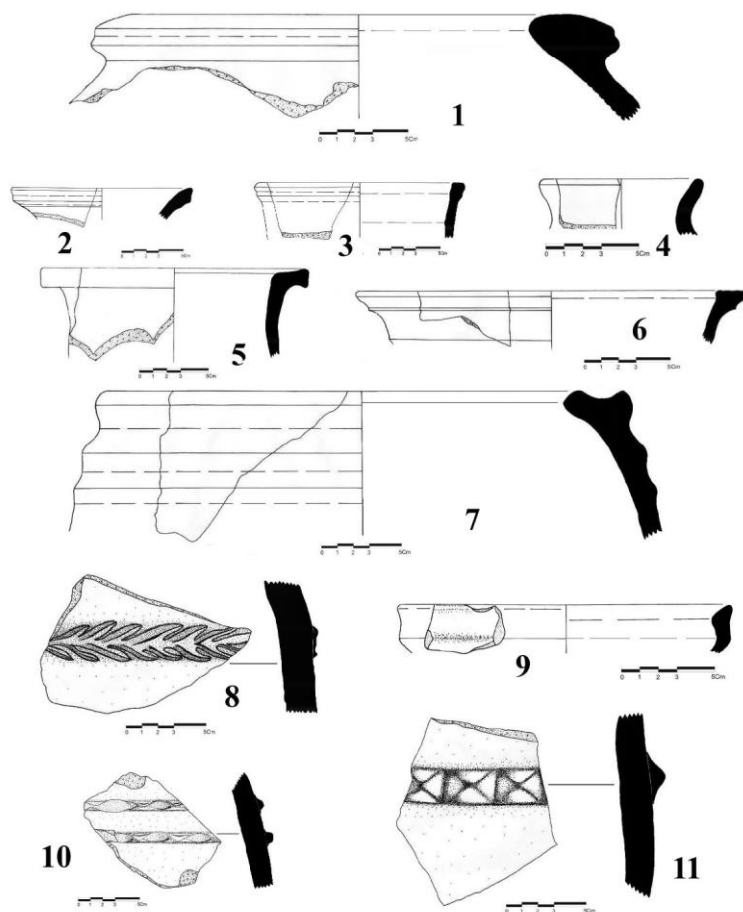


Fig 5: Decoration of potteries comparable to Parthian potteries in west of Iran

Plain Pottery (Fig. 5): GovarQale 1,2,3, Upper Kuhkan, OghlanQalasi, Foqlake 1,2, SharfanDarreh and Darram sites contain plain pottery. Regarding this aspect, these sites are considered as belonging to late Parthian period, dating from 100 to 225 AD⁷. However, it is very difficult to

⁷ Ernie Herink, *Iran's Earthenware in Parthian Period*, translated by Hamideh Chubak, Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran (Research Institute), 1977, P. 121.

accurately distinguish Parthian specimens from those of Sassanian in recognizing plain pottery.

Plain potteries found in the above sites are decorated with ropy texture, grooves on the edges, parallel lines, fishbone and waved decorations. The type of decoration is observable in other sites like Kangavar⁸, Yazdgerd Castle⁹ and Behistun¹⁰.

Fillide Pottery (Fig 4): The third group, named fillide by Fahimi, is known with red dough, dark and light red and black gravel in within, as well as mica and limy gravels. The firing process is incomplete and the surface is thick and red¹¹. Its decoration is mostly adjunct ropy and jagged paintings. At the sites of GovarQale 1,2, Upper KuhKan and OghlanQalasi, potteries with above specifications were found that were considered by joint group of Iranian and Japanese archeologists, excavating western coast of SefidRud, to date back to Parthian period¹².

Specifications of Fig. 3

No	Dough color	Mixture	Inside surface	Color of Inside surface	Surface	Color of The surface	Manufacturing method	Firing	Decoration	Comparison And specification
1	Grey - Red	Sand and gravel	Thick clay	Light brown	Thick clay	Brown - red	Pottery wheel	insufficient	Ropy adjunct	
2	Grey - Red	sand	clay	red	clay	goldenrod	pottery wheel	insufficient	----	
3	Grey - Red	Mica Mineral	Thick clay	goldenrod	Thick clay	red	pottery wheel	insufficient	----	¹
4	Grey - Red	Mineral Lime	Thick clay	Dark brown	Thick clay	Brown-red	pottery wheel	insufficient	----	
5	Grey - Red	Sand and gravel	Thin clay	brown	Thick clay	Brown- red	pottery wheel	insufficient	Finger touched adjunct	²

⁸Seifollah Kambakhsh Fard, *Archaeological Excavations at Kangavar City*, Iranian Journal of Archeology and Art, No.9 and 10, 1971, P. 6.

⁹E.J Keall and M.J Keall, *The Qaleh-iYazdgird Pottery: A Statistical Approach*, Iran XIX: 33-81,1981, P.40-54.

¹⁰WolframClace, *The area known as the Parthian Domain*, Bisotun, 2006, P. 112.

¹¹Hamid Fahimi, *Falidah Earthenware; A Species of a Parthian Local Earthenware In the West Mountains of Sepidrood*", Archaeological Reports (3), Archaeological Research Institute of the National Heritage Organization, 2004.

¹²JebraelNokandeh and Hamid Fahimi, *Archaeological Investigations of the Joint Iran-Japan Board on the West Bank of Sepidrood in Guilan in 2001-2001*, Archaeological Reports (2), Archaeological Research Institute of the National Heritage Organization, 2003.

Specifications of Fig. 4

No	Dough color	Mixture	Inside surface	Color of The inside surface	Outside surface	Surface Color	Manufacturing method	Firing	Decoratio n type	Comparison And Specification
1	Goldenrod	Mineral	----	Goldenrod	Thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Decorated	
2	Goldenrod	Mineral	----	Goldenrod	Thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Decorated	3
3	Goldenrod	Unknown	----	Goldenrod	Thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Decorated	4
4	Goldenrod	Unknown	----	Goldenrod	Thin clay	Goldenrod	Hand made	Sufficient	Decorated	

Specifications of Fig. 5

			clay	d	clay					
4	brown	Mineral	thin clay	brown	thick clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	-----	
5	Grey	Fine sand	thin clay	brown	thick clay	Brown	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	-----	7
6	Goldenrod	Fine sand	thin clay	Goldenrod	thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	-----	8
7	Light brown	Sand	thin clay	Light brown	thick clay	Light brown	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	-----	9
8	brown and Grey	Fine sand And gravel	-----	Brown	thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Adjunct decoration	10
9	Orange	Mineral	thin clay	Orange	thin clay	Orange	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	-----	11
10	Light brown	Mineral	-----	Light Brown	thin clay	Light brown	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Adjunct-ropy	
11	Light red	Coarse sand and organic material	-----	Light red	thin clay	Goldenrod	Pottery wheel	Sufficient	Adjunct	

Conclusion

Given that the manufacturing of the decorated potteries is originated in older traditions and continued until the 1st century BC, plain potteries, in addition to the later Parthian period, were also found in the west of the country, in the second and the first centuries BC. So, the presence of pottery in the sites identified in the study area indicates the continuous settlement in the area during the Parthian period. However, considering the pottery section of this study, one can come to the conclusion that the pottery tradition within the study area is influenced by the pottery culture of the neighboring areas in the north, northwest and west of the country.

In the section of environmental characteristics, we found that the extent and aggregation of Parthian sites of the study area in areas of low altitude and slope is much greater than in areas of high altitude and slope. Given that the low areas of the study area have high quality soil, reliable and permanent water resources, it can be concluded the prevailing economic pattern of Parthian period had been agriculture and horticulture. Considering the vast expanse of the Darram Castle site, and the pottery of the late Parthian

period and the castle, as well as the extensive agricultural lands adjacent to the mentioned site, it is perceivable that the study area had had an important role during the late centuries of Parthian period.

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Fig 1. Location of the study area

Fig 2. The location of Parthian areas

Fig 3. Decoration of Fillide potteries(writers' references).

Fig 4. Decoration potteries (writers' references).

Fig 5. Decoration of potteries comparable to Parthian potteries in west of Iran(writers' references).

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