

The Hasanlu (Iran) Gold Bowl in context: all that glitters...

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The discovery of a crushed golden bowl in the remains of the Iron Age citadel of Hasanlu in 1958 attracted considerable media attention at the time. The circumstances of its loss have long remained unclear, but were clearly associated with the violent destruction of the site in c. 800 BC. Detailed review of the find context and the skeletons found nearby now suggests that the bowl was being looted during the sack of the citadel by Urartian soldiers from an upper room where weapons, armour and fine metal vessels were stored. The enemy soldiers carrying off the Gold Bowl died in the attempt when the upper floors of the building collapsed, plunging them to their deaths.

This paper is published in full in *Antiquity* 88 no. 341 September 2014. Here we publish supplementary material.

Skeletons (SK) 37–39

Three skeletons (SK37–39) lay in Stratum 3 within Room 9 with the Gold Bowl and other objects—what I dub the ‘Gold Bowl Group’. In some cases, the proveniences of objects were not recorded beyond ‘BBIW Room 9’ in the excavation notes (see below). Skeletons 37 and 39 were collected and are stored in the University of Pennsylvania Museum (UPM 59-4-105 and UPM 59-4-106). Both are young adult males (Dulik 2005; Selinsky 2009: 208). Skeleton 38 was discarded in the field; the excavators believed it was a young adult male given the associated objects and the skeleton’s robusticity (see below). An excavation photo (Negative 78082-14) shows some fragments of SK38’s skeleton, most notably the distal half of the right humerus, which is indeed from an unusually muscular individual.

SK37 lay in the north-west corner of Room 9 (Figures S1 & S2). The disposition of the skeleton indicates he was facing/moving south-east when he fell down and south-eastward, ultimately landing on his right side and across the legs of SK38, whom he was apparently

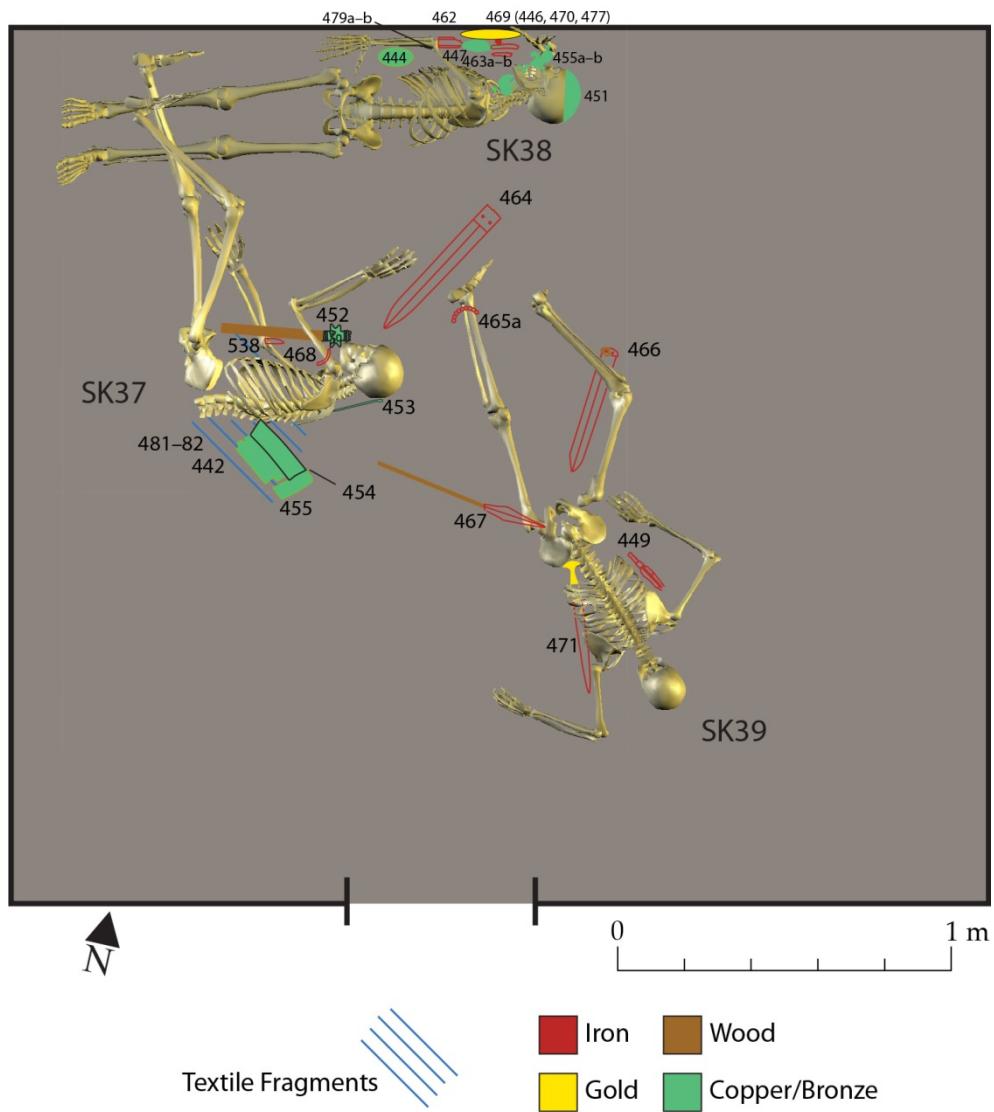


Figure S1. Hasanlu Tepe: reconstruction of BBIW Room 9 Gold Bowl Group (Figure 6 in full article).

following closely (Dyson 1959: 14). He had flung out his left arm to protect himself when he fell. The left gonial mandibular angle was embedded in the proximal end (head) of the left humerus (Figure S3). Dyson believes this was caused by the crushing action of building collapse (Dyson 1959: 14). After the soldiers fell, their bodies and associated objects were partially burned by flaming debris falling into the room. The degree of preservation of carbonised textiles below SK37's torso (see below) and other carbonised organic remains associated with SK37 and SK39 indicates that the initial upper-storey collapse deposit was sealed by a second building collapse shortly after the soldiers' fall that smothered the flames, preventing the fire from consuming all the organic materials.

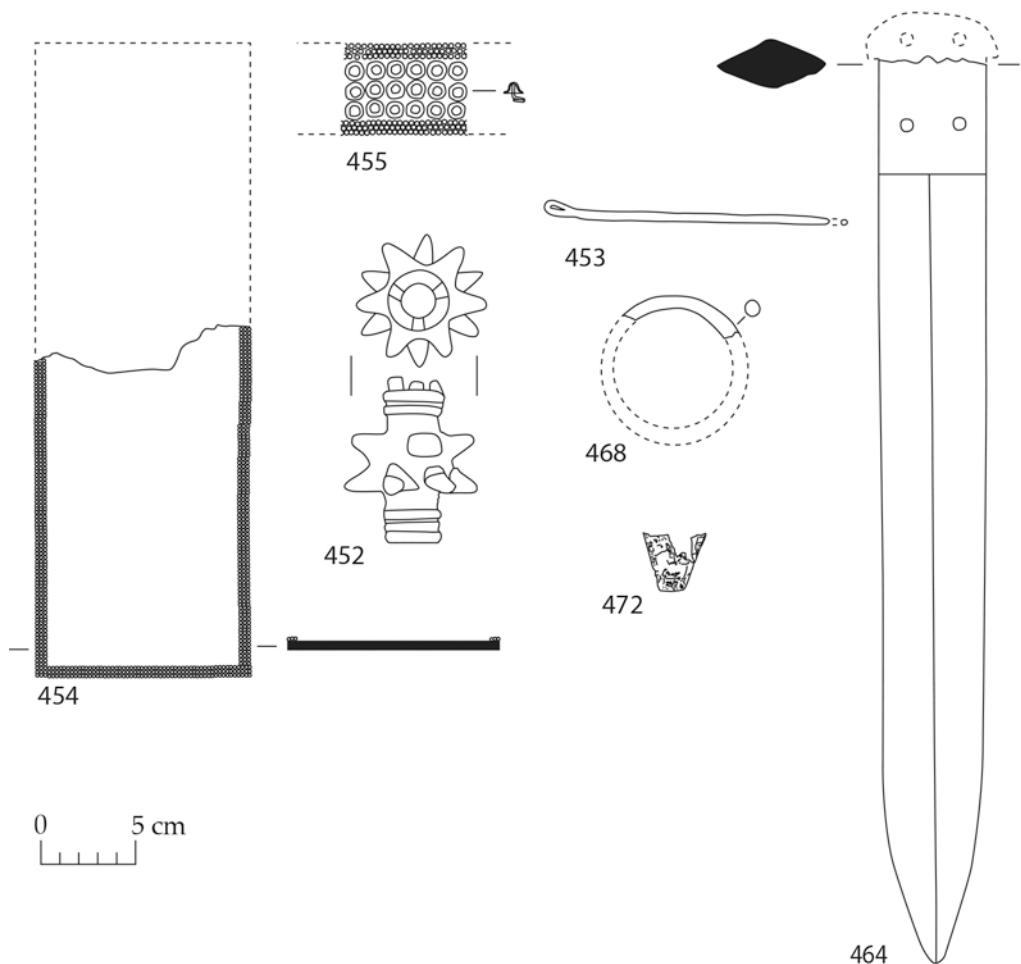


Figure S2. Hasanlu Tepe: BBIW Room 9 objects found with combatant SK37.



Figure S3. Hasanlu Tepe: mandible embedded in the left humerus of SK37.

SK37 wore a simple iron armlet on the upper left arm (Figure S2: 468, in the figures the objects registered in the 1958 season are given by Hasanlu Number without the ‘58-‘ year prefix), a class of personal ornament with a wide distribution in the early Iron Age. An iron short-sword lay in front of the face (Figure S2: 464; Thornton & Pigott 2011: fig. 6.26), presumably dropped when SK37 thrust out his arm(s) while falling, and is of the same type as SK39’s short-sword (see below, HAS58-466). This type is otherwise unknown at Hasanlu. A similar short-sword is depicted in an Assyrian palace relief from Khorsabad carried by an Assyrian huntsman (Layard 1853a: pl. 32 left); however, the depiction of material culture in Assyrian palace reliefs is not perforce an indication of Assyrian origin. Such short-swords are not demonstrably typical of Assyria or western Iran and are highly utilitarian (Thornton & Pigott 2011: fig. 6.26 caption). A copper/bronze spiked mace head (Figure S2: 452) with carbonised and attached wooden handle (preserved length 30cm) and an iron dagger blade (HAS58-538, not illustrated or otherwise recorded) lay parallel to the body at the right elbow. SK37 probably carried the mace in one hand and the short-sword in the other. Muhle has shown that spiked maces such as these, Muhle’s Types 7.2–7.3, cluster in the Lake Urmia region (although the attestations from controlled excavations are almost exclusively from use-related contexts in the Hasanlu IVb destruction level) and in Karabulag Kurgan N5 and the nearby Lake Sevan area (Muhle 2008: 115–16, 505–10; Muscarella 1988: 57–58, nos. 69–70, and see below). A shoulder strap decorated with copper/bronze studs (Figure S2: 455), an attached copper/bronze quiver containing no arrowheads (Figure S2: 454), a copper/bronze needle/garment pin (Figure S2: 453), and carbonised textile fragments (HAS58-481a–b, 482) lay partly under the mid torso and behind the back (de Schauensee 2011b: 69; Love 2011: appendix 2.1). Dyson believes the long needle/garment pin fastened a tunic at the neck (Dyson 1959: 14). A similar needle-like garment pin (HAS64-296) was found in the grave of a warrior (SK493a) in the Hasanlu North Cemetery (Danti & Cifarelli in press). We might expect a scabbard for SK37’s short-sword to have been suspended at a fold in the shoulder strap, and an excavation photo shows a layer of carbonised material within a well-preserved fold just below the quiver (Figure S4). An Assyrian palace relief from Khorsabad depicts a similarly arranged and manufactured shoulder strap with the same type of sheathed short-sword (Layard 1853a: pl. 32, 1853b: 130), and quivers are shown, albeit rarely, suspended from shoulder straps at the waist in Neo-Assyrian reliefs (e.g. Layard 1849: pls. 5 & 17). Two fragments of decorated gold foil (Figure S2: 472), the design illegible, also lay under the body or behind the back and possibly decorated the terminal of the putative

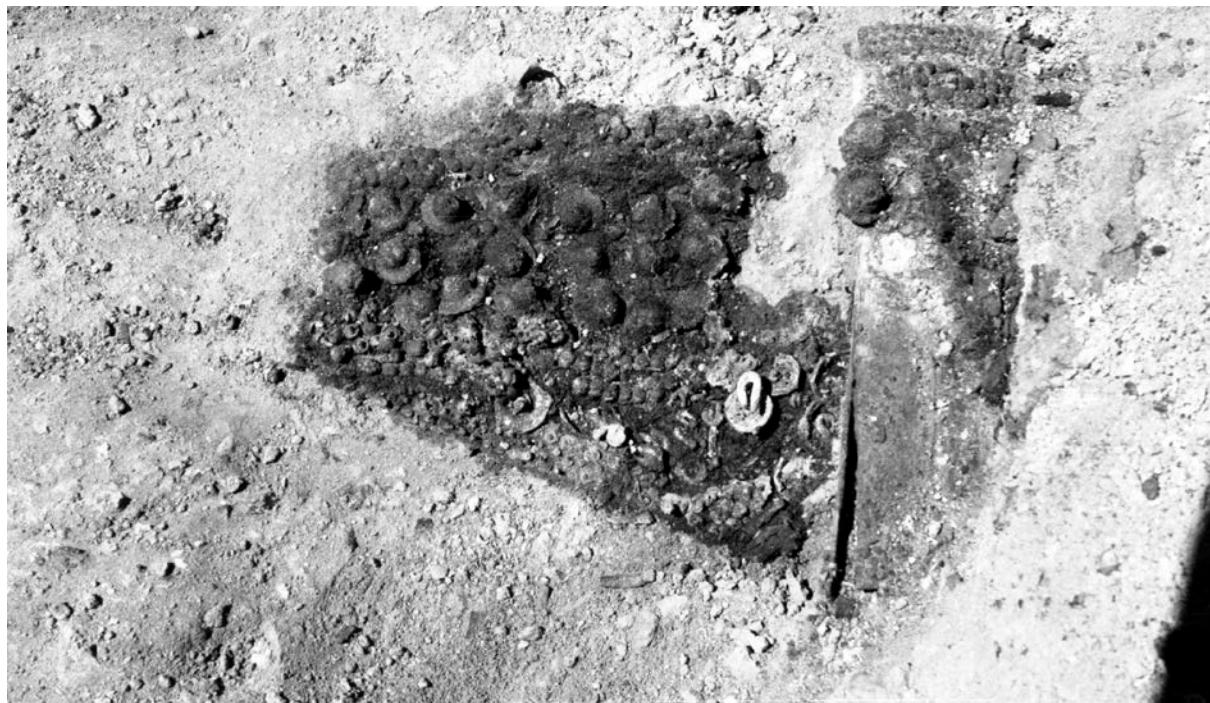


Figure S4. Right: the folded (scabbard) end of the copper/bronze-studded shoulder strap (HAS58-455) worn by SK37. Left: part of SK37's copper/bronze quiver (HAS58-454) attached to and between the straps of the shoulder strap.

scabbard. The gold foil has the same shape as the short-sword's tip and is of the appropriate dimensions for a scabbard. Dyson asserted in his notes: "These objects [shoulder strap, quiver and textiles] appear to have been being carried by the man and not worn by him" (Hasanlu Excavation Notebook 7: 10). The position of the shoulder strap, the neatly preserved fold in the strap with carbonised material (Figure S4), and the attached quiver at mid torso indicate SK37 wore these items. Dyson was operating under the assumption that item HAS58-455 was a belt rather than a shoulder strap and hence would have been worn about the waist. In support of SK37 wearing these items, the weapons carried by SK37 (mace and short-sword) were found in the area of the arms: SK37 had evidently flung at least his left arm forward while falling.

SK38 was carrying the Gold Bowl (Figure S1, no. 469) and many other objects when he died. The lateral force of collapsing debris from the upper storey(s) appears to have crushed/pinned his upper body and the Gold Bowl against the north wall. Dyson noted that SK38 was "badly crushed by roof collapse which included small paving stones" (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 11). The left forearm was "just next to bowl" and parallel to the wall. The position of the right hand and forearm suggested to Dyson that the "arm was flung forward over the head to protect in

falling” (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 7). Dyson also noted that: “Behind [right] arm bones lay a thin film ½cm thick of powdery yellow and plum red substance—leather or textile [remains]” (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 7). Rows of small copper/bronze buttons and one larger copper/bronze boss (Figure S5: 445a–b) lay beneath this residue and had been sewn to the leather or textile, forming a reinforced gauntlet of 30 × 70cm that covered the right arm from wrist to shoulder. A similarly reinforced full shirt is depicted in an Assyrian wall painting of the eighth century at Tell Ahmar/*Til Barsip* worn by an Assyrian soldier (Parrot 1961: fig. 116). In some cases, the Hasanlu excavation notes (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 11) and some publications (Dyson 1959: 14) incorrectly place the gauntlet on the left arm. De Schauensee (2011b: 69) mistakenly attributes this object to the *left arm* of SK37, but in the caption for her accompanying plate 3.4 correctly lists the gauntlet with SK38; however, this plate shows quiver and shoulder strap HAS58-454 and 455, which, based on all excavation records, were found with SK37. The gauntlet found with SK38 was, based on all excavation records, HAS58-445a–b—the delicate object that initially brought Dyson personally to excavate the Gold Bowl find spot in 1958 (see above; Dyson 1959: 14; Winter 1989: 88).

SK38 wore an unusual copper/bronze skullcap or helmet liner on his head (Figure S5: 451). Post-excavation addenda to the archival records (Notebook 7: 11) change this object to a ‘bowl’, but the original excavation notes and sketches record it as a helmet worn on the skull—the cranium and helmet were partially flattened by the building collapse. Dyson unequivocally states that SK38’s skull was “crushed in its cap of copper” (1958: 14). I believe this object is the reinforced skullcap for a leather helmet: unlike copper/bronze bowls from Hasanlu, this object lacks a thickened or folded rim, and an object photo (Negative 78093-7) shows its exterior was discoloured and encrusted with what appears to be a carbonised organic residue. A similar helmet is known from Marlik Tomb 26 (Negahban 1995: 92, helmet 92 M, pl. XIII no. 163) and similar headgear may be attested in Assyrian depictions of archers (e.g. Layard 1853: pl. 20). Two beads (Figure S5: 479a & b) were found beneath the left elbow. The socket of an iron weapon (Figure S5: 462) and an iron ‘rod’ (Figure S5: 463a–b), probably the deteriorated parts of a socketed spearhead, were situated parallel to the wall and above the Gold Bowl, thus SK38 was probably armed. Excavation drawings show a crushed copper/bronze bowl lay below the Gold Bowl and another was located south-west of it higher in the collapse layer (not illustrated 447, 444). Other notes on SK38 list three crushed copper/bronze bowls in proximity to the Gold Bowl (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 11). These bowls strongly suggest SK38 was carrying a stack of looted

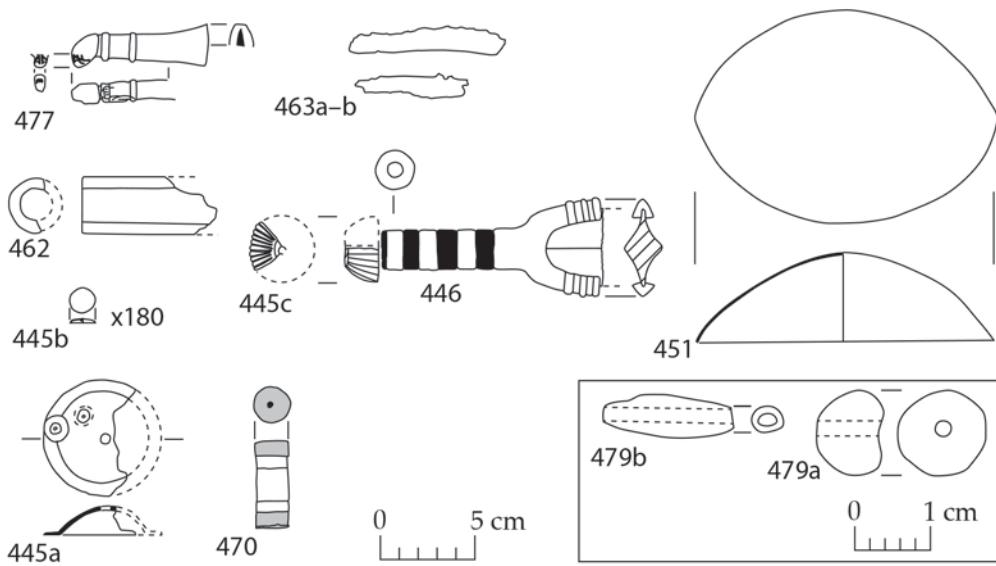


Figure S5. Hasanlu Tepe: BBIW Room 9 objects found with combatant SK38.

containers, as do other inexactly provenienced metal containers from the room (see below). The Gold Bowl contained three elite items: 1) a cylinder seal (Figure S5: 470; Marcus 1996: no. 43, 110, pl. 15) of red and white stone with gold caps (no engraved design); 2) a dagger (Figure S5: 445c, 446) comprising an iron blade (almost completely deteriorated), ribbed bone pommel, and a grip fashioned from rings of red sandstone and ivory around a bronze core and; 3) a bone or ivory animal-headed whisk handle (Figure S5: 477) in the Neo-Assyrian style (see for example Layard 1849: pls. 5 & 12). Similar daggers were discovered in the *hypogeum* grave of two warriors in the Hasanlu North Cemetery (Danti & Cifarelli in press, Grave SK105–106), the upper-storey collapse layer of BBII Room 12 (HAS64-1017), and allegedly at Ziwiye (Ghirshman 1964: 118, fig. 159).

SK39 (Burial 3), an armed young adult male, lay face down orientated north-west to south-east with the head to the south-east (Figures S1 & S6). Like SK37, the orientation of his skeletal remains indicates he was probably moving from north-west to south-east when he fell downward and in a south-easterly direction. An iron ball anklet was worn on the right ankle (Figure S7: 465a). This ‘rosary-like’ style of anklet/armlet in iron or copper alloys is only otherwise attested in an elite, atypical Iron II warrior *hypogeum* in the Hasanlu Low Mound cemetery (SK105–106), possibly the grave of migrants from the north (Danti & Cifarelli in press), and the Urartian cemetery of Igdir (Barnett 1963: 180, fig. 32 nos. 7–8). An iron socketed spear (Figure S7: 467) lay in the fill above the right buttock, and its carbonised wooden handle is visible in excavation photographs near the right upper leg



Figure S6. Hasanlu Tepe: combatant SK39 in Room 9 of BBIW.

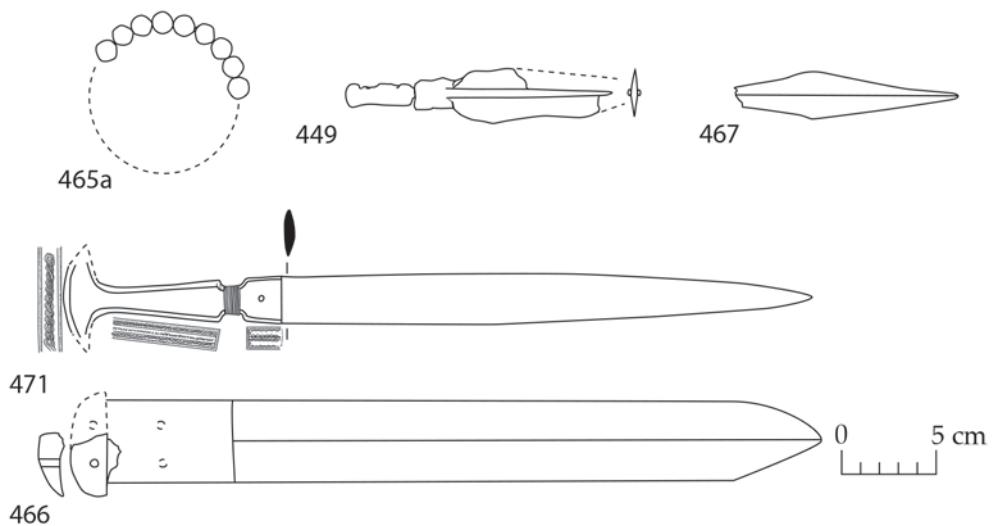


Figure S7. Hasanlu Tepe: BBIW Room 9 objects found with combatant SK39.

(Figure S6). A dagger with an iron blade and a handle decorated with gold foil (Figure S7: 471) in a carbonised wooden scabbard, currently a unique attestation of this dagger type for the Iron II Near East, and a bimetallic spearhead with iron blade and copper/bronze grooved mid-rib (Figure S7: 449) lay under the right chest and right upper arm. The latter object was previously interpreted as a dagger, but has been recently re-evaluated by Thornton and Pigott (2011: 150–51). The position of the sheathed dagger suggested to the excavator (Hasanlu Notebook 7: 7) that it was slung from a shoulder strap, which would be similar to the equipment of SK37. No physical remains of an associated shoulder strap were recorded on SK39, although a second shoulder strap was found in Room 9; its position was not recorded (see below). An iron short-sword with wooden grip and crescent pommel (Figure S7: 466) lay beneath and between the legs. This sword is similar in its grip and distinctive blade form to sword HAS58-464 found near SK37 (see above). Unlike the typical daggers and short-swords of Hasanlu, these blades are not tapered. Their unique form supports the interpretation of SK37–39 as enemy combatants and indicates some standardisation in the attackers' equipment, as do spiked maces and socketed spears (see below).

Several more objects were found in Room 9 at or near the destruction surface level but their proveniences were not recorded beyond this. This floating assemblage includes debris that was discarded down this refuse shaft during the building's use-phase and objects that were probably part of the soldiers' equipment and loot. Two Monochrome Burnished Ware beakers (Figure S8a: 438 & 439), both typical of the Iron II in terms of ware and form, a ceramic lamp (Figure S8a: 437), a spindle whorl (Figure S8a: 440), and two grinding stones (Figure S8a: 475 & 476) probably constitute part of the waste disposal deposit. Six copper/bronze vessels (Figure S8a: 457–460, not illustrated: 448a–b) are conceivably among the loot carried by SK38 or the other soldiers, similar to the aforementioned bowls found with the Gold Bowl. An iron blade from a spear (Figure S8a: 467) was probably one of the soldiers' weapons.

More puzzling are two copper/bronze sheet 'belts' allegedly found in Room 9, but their exact locations were unfortunately unspecified. The fragmentary simple sheet 'belt', more likely a shoulder strap, extant length 60cm, is perforated at the edges for attachment to a backing and has a circular, attached, perforated terminal (Figure S8a: 456). A similar type with unattached, circular, perforated terminal was found in the Hasanlu North Cemetery in an Iron II stone *hypogeum* containing the interments of two warriors (Danti & Cifarelli in press, Grave SK105–106). Given the paucity of data on the exact use of such 'belts'—they are

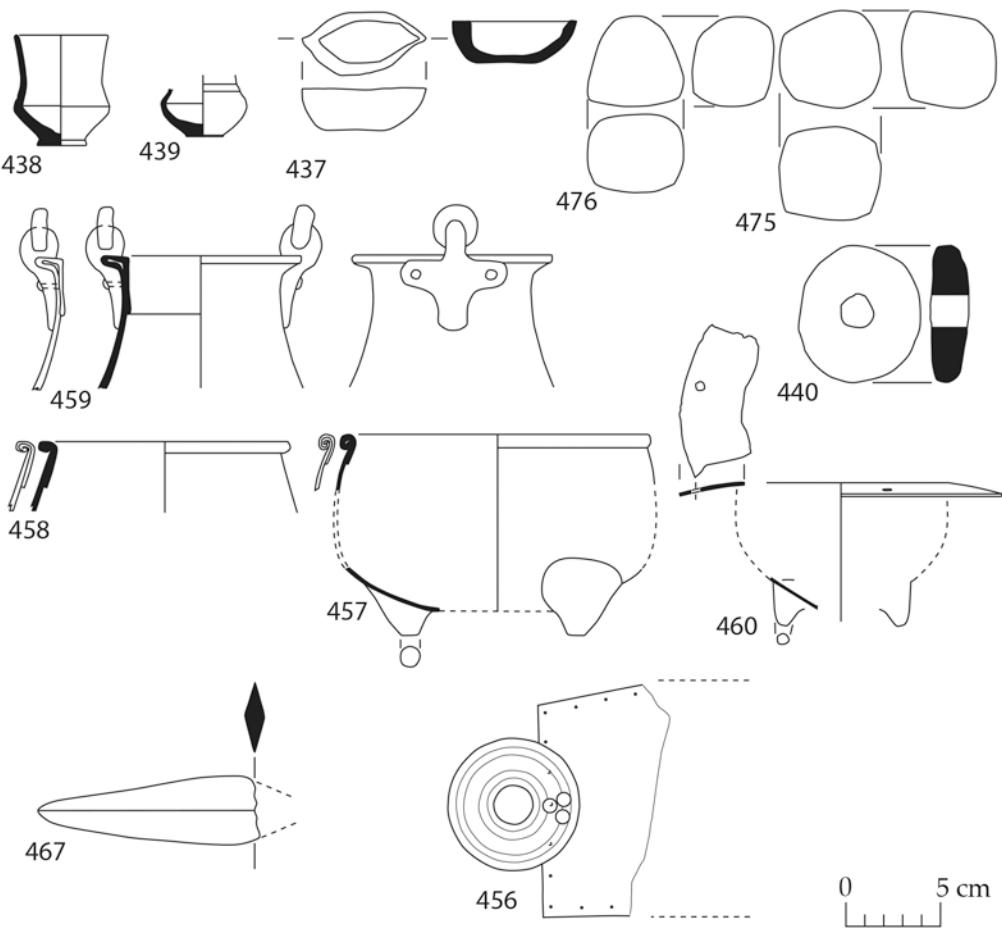


Figure S8. Hasanlu Tepe: BBIW Room 9 objects without exact provenience recorded.

seldom found about the waist—the default interpretation should favour shoulder straps when these items are associated with swords, daggers and quivers/bow cases. The second belt is studded and decorated with an elaborate repoussé circular boss (HAS58-450). The form leaves no doubt this is truly a belt to be worn about the waist. This belt and two others, HAS64-288 and HAS58-244, are discussed by Winter (1980: 27). Winter locates HAS58-450 in BBIW Room 1 with HAS58-244, the building’s portico, but all the excavation records specify HAS58-450 was found in Room 9. A similar belt (HAS64-288) comes from the simple cist grave of an Iron II warrior in the North Cemetery (Danti & Cifarelli in press, Grave SK493a; de Schauensee 1988: 52, figs. 36–37), and we see another was stored in an upper storey of BBIW and fell into Room 1. Thus, such belts belonged to the warriors of Hasanlu and were stored upstairs in BBIW at the time of the fire. In light of this, I believe this unplaced belt formed part of the soldiers’ loot—there is no recorded evidence it was worn by SK37–39. Alternatively, it may be among the few conceivable objects that simply fell into Room 9 from the upstairs storage areas when the building collapsed.

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