

From nomadism to early state: bioarcheological reconstruction of social and economic processes in Central Iran during the Iron Age

The aim of archeology is the understanding of past populations. Although most researches are based solely on the analysis of ancient artifacts and objects, due to the development in human osteology and introduction of interdisciplinary bioarcheological and biochemical analyses, our insight into past may be much more complex and focus directly into an individual's life. Although ancient Near East is the most important place where early civilizations developed, only a few interdisciplinary projects were focusing so far on the population that lived there. During the Early Iron Age significant social and economic changes occurred in the Near East, and specifically in the Central Iran the population of Medes developed an early territorial state. However, little is known about this period due to the small number of archeological sites excavated so far and the scarcity of historical sources. The aim of the project is to analyze differences between Iron Age I (c. 1400-1100 BC in local chronology), Iron Age II (c. 1100-850 BC) and Iron Age III (c. 850-550 BC) in the region of Kashan (Isfahan province, Iran) in various aspects of life that may be reconstructed using bioarcheological and archaeological approach. Human remains from five cemeteries representing this period will be analyzed to establish local demography, frequency of pathologies and skeletal stress markers (associated with nutritional status). Moreover, diet and mobility of local population will be studied based on the analysis of isotopic ratios in human bones and teeth, that are changing according to the type and origin of consumed food. The contribution of animal derived food and local crop/fodder plants will be evaluated as well as possible evidence of seasonal pastoralism, with a main question whether subsistence strategy changed in subsequent chronological periods. Moreover, the pattern of mobility of local population will be studied in order to trace possible changes due to the development of the early territorial state. The current project will fill an important gap in the Early Iron Age archeology of Iran and may contribute significantly to better understanding of social and economic changes in this period, especially in context of the Median state formation.