



## Project Gallery

# Bampur 14: a late fourth- to early second-millennium BC cemetery in south-eastern Iran

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South-eastern Iran flourished during the Bronze Age and several important settlements from this period have been excavated. Few contemporaneous cemeteries, however, have been investigated. Excavations at Bampur 14 have revealed 10 graves dating from the late fourth to early second millennium BC. Finds include a copper-bronze seal and a stone column, demonstrating connections with north-eastern Iran and Central Asia.

Keywords: Iran, Baluchistan, Bampur Valley, Bronze Age, cemetery

## Introduction

In the third millennium BC, large cities and settlements emerged in south-eastern Iran, such as Shahr-i Sokhta, Shahdad, Tepe Yahya and Konar Sandal (Lamberg-Karlovsky 1970; Tosi 1983; Hakemi 1997; Sajjadi 2003; Madjidzadeh & Pittman 2008). Evidence for both metallurgy and the processing of semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli and chlorite, demonstrates the region's key role in exchange between the Bronze Age cultures of Western Asia. Despite its importance, however, this area has seen few excavations.

Iranian Baluchistan, including Bampur Valley, is poorly documented archaeologically. Until the investigations reported here, archaeological work in the region was limited to soundings at Khurab and Damin (Stein 1937), and excavations at Tepe Bampur (de Cardi 1970; Sajjadi 2005). Recent surveys, however, have increased archaeological knowledge of the region. Bampur Valley was surveyed in 2002 by Rahbar (Rahbar 2003) and later by Mortazavi (Mortazavi & Mosapour Negari 2010); excavations were conducted at Bampur 14 in 2003 by Rahbar (Figures 1 & 2), with further survey by Moradi in 2010 (Moradi *et al.* 2014; Mutin *et al.* 2017a). This article reports results of the 2003 excavations at Bampur 14.

## Bampur 14

Bampur 14 cemetery sits on a low ridge on the southern bank of the Bampur River, near the village of Saidabad (27°09'40"N, 60°23'19"E; 498m asl). It extends 100 × 50m and probably had around 150 graves. The site has, unfortunately, suffered illegal looting. In 2003, three 10 × 10m trenches and one 2 × 2m test trench were opened, marking the first large-scale excavation of a prehistoric cemetery in Bampur Valley. Fifteen graves were discovered, of which 10 (Graves 1–4, 7, 9–11, 14 & 15) had intact grave goods (Figure 2; Table 1).

Received: 6 February 2021; Revised: 26 December 2021; Accepted: 2 January 2022

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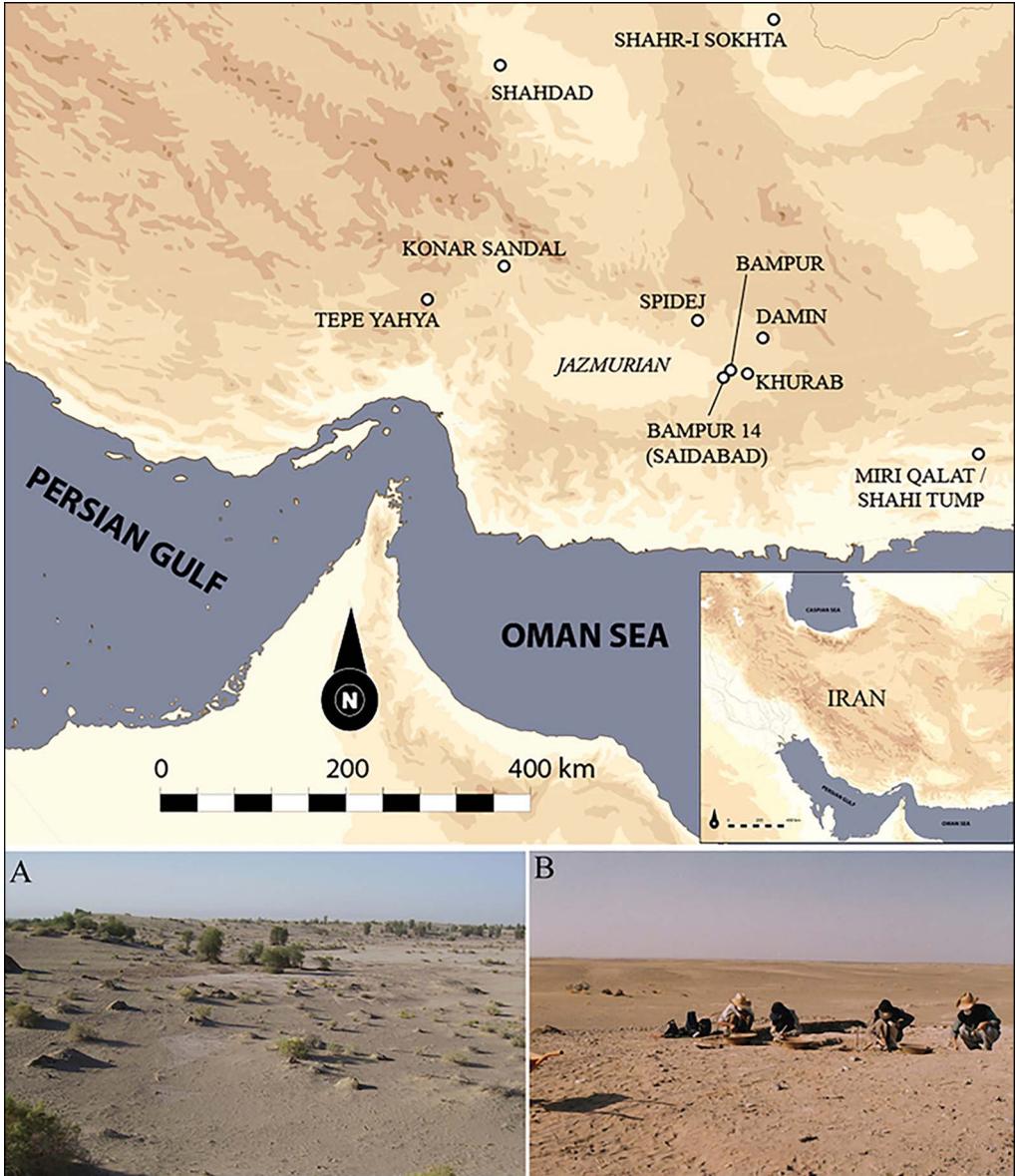


Figure 1. The location of Bampur 14 in south-eastern Iran (courtesy of F. Dasset), and general view of the Site (A & B) (courtesy of H. Moradi).

Due to the damage caused by illegal excavations, there are doubts about the identification of 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13 as graves.

The Bampur 14 graves take three forms: square, circular and irregular. Graves 1, 3, 7, 9 and 10 comprised square pits with crouched inhumations. This recalls type 6 graves at Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi 2003: 27 & fig. 4) and grave 336 at Shahdad (Hakemi 1997: 513). Graves 4, 11, 14 and 15 were circular pits lined with mud or mudbricks. These are

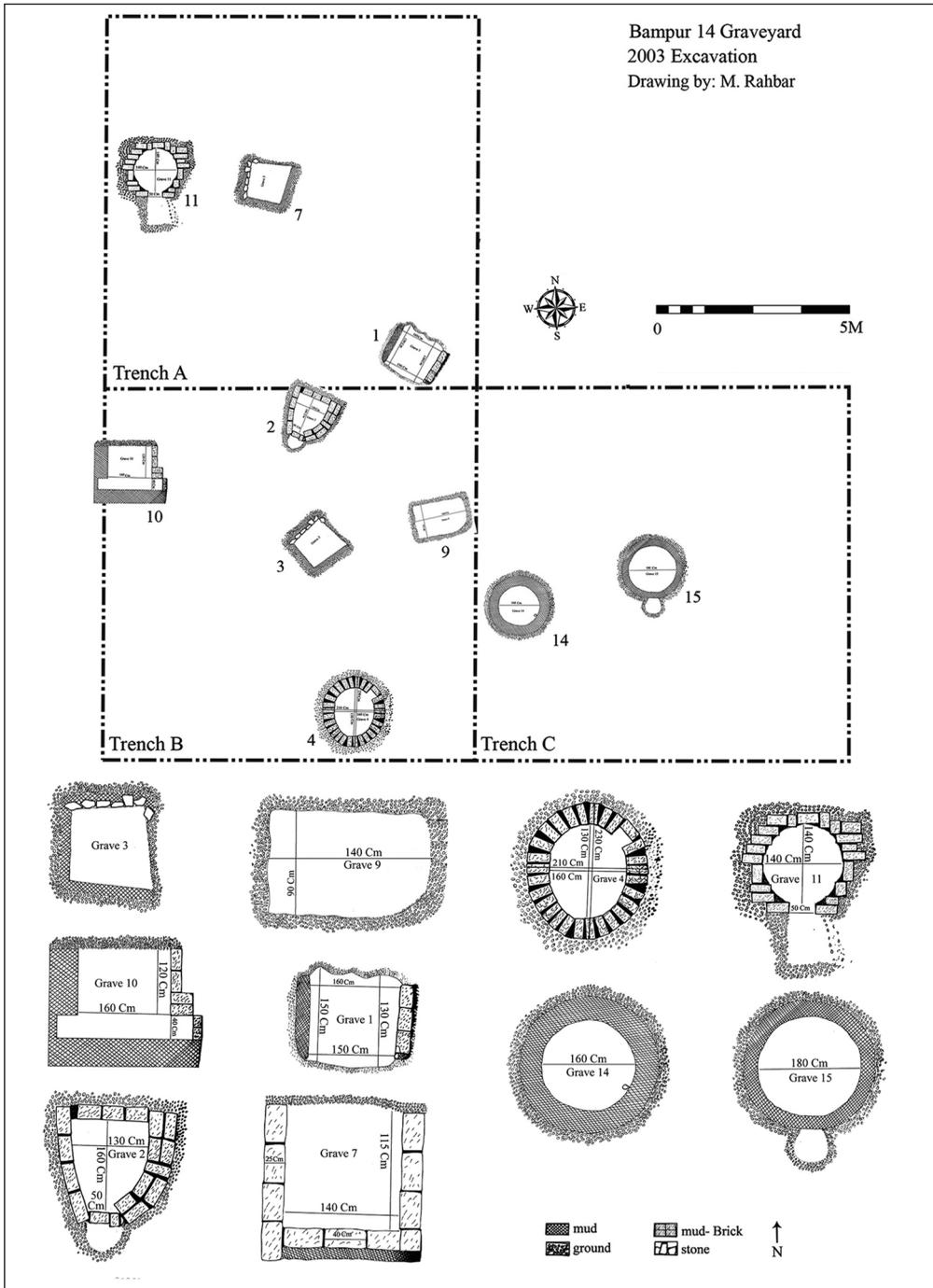


Figure 2. Bampur 14: excavation area and plan of graves (figure by M. Rahbar).

Table 1. Graves and their finds.

Grave no.	Shape	Material	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Ceramic vessels	Stone	Copper-bronze
1	Square	Mud and mudbrick	1.50–1.60	1.30–1.50	1.60	51		
2	Irregular	Mudbrick	1.30	1.60	1.60	4	Eight beads	Cup, dagger and one degraded object
3	Square	Mud and mudbrick	1.30	1.20–1.50	1.20	5		
4	Circular	Mudbrick		1.30–1.60	1.50	4		
7	Square	Mud and mudbrick, and stone	1.40	1.15	1.40	40	One vessel fragment	
9	Square		1.40	0.90		11		Cup, three daggers
10	Square	Mud and mudbricks	1.60	1.20	1.30	100	Vessel base, chert blade, three beads	Beaker, axe, mirror, two blades, two degraded objects
11	Circular	Mudbricks		1.40	1.40		Column, three vessel fragments	Seal, cup
14	Circular	Mud		1.60	0.77	2		
15	Circular	Mud		1.80				



Figure 3. Pottery vessels from various graves (scales in cm) (photograph by M. Rahbar).

similar to type 8 graves at Shahr-i Sokhta (Sajjadi 2003: 27 & fig. 4). Grave 2 is a different shape; made from unbaked mudbricks, it had a semi-circular western end, and irregular northern and eastern sides. A 0.50m-wide entrance—blocked with bricks—provided access at the south end.

## Finds

The quantity and type of grave goods varies significantly between the graves. The circular graves collectively contained only four ceramic vessels, while one square grave (10) yielded 100 vessels. Circular graves contained no stone beads, and few artefacts. Ceramics placed with bodies were usually deposited in two different layers. Most objects were placed near the body, but some were deposited approximately 0.7m higher, probably during the closing of the grave. Perhaps due to fluctuating environmental conditions, preservation of human remains is poor, with bones surviving only as fragments. The exception is Grave 15, where a semi-intact, crouched inhumation was preserved.

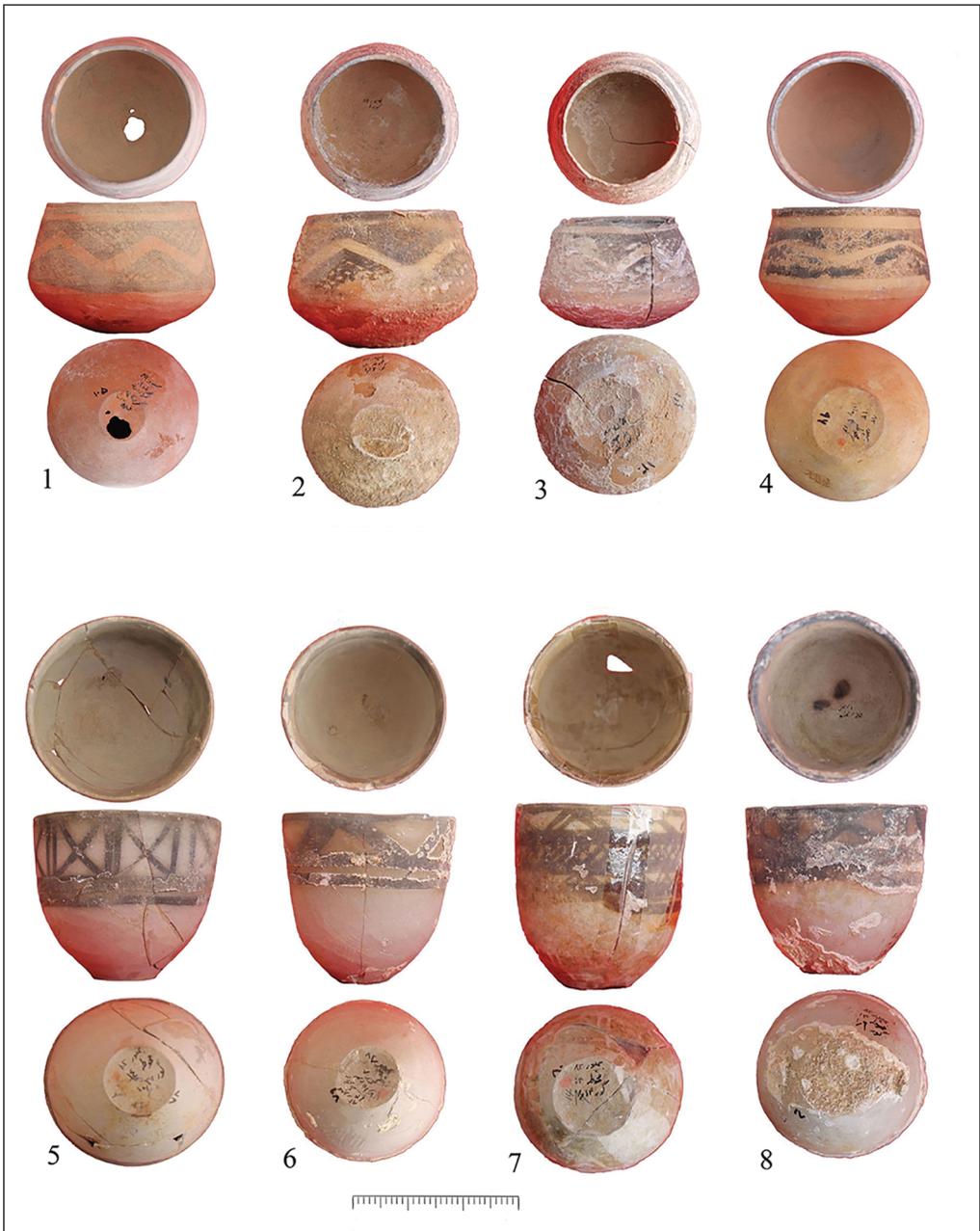


Figure 4. Pottery vessels from various graves (scale in cm) (photograph by Y. Saeidpour).

### Pottery and other finds

The ceramic vessels recovered total 209, comprising 92 red-ware (44.5 per cent) and 117 grey-ware (55.5 per cent) (Figures 3, 4 & 5). Other grave goods include beads of stone

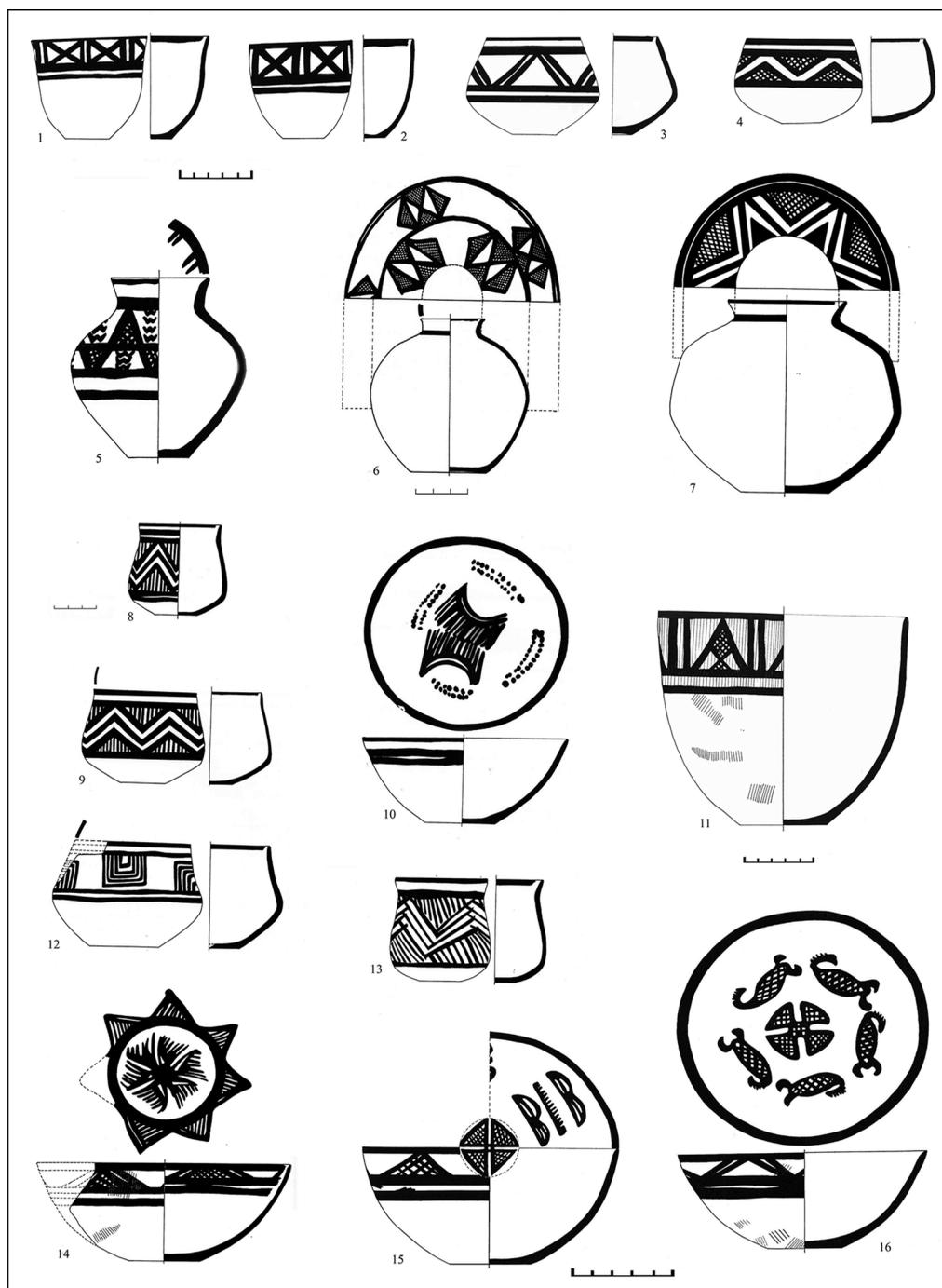


Figure 5. Pottery vessels from various graves (scales in cm) (figure by M. Rahbar).

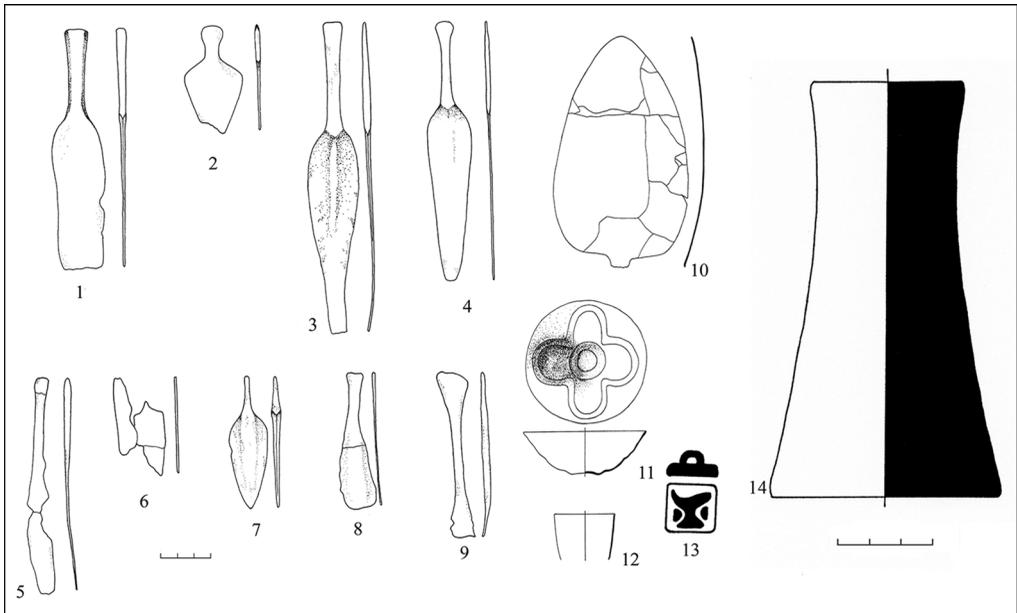


Figure 6. Illustrations of metal finds and the stone column (scales in cm) (figure by M. Rabbar).

and bone; an animal horn; spears, daggers, an axe, a seal (Figure 6), a goblet and various small utensils of copper-bronze; chert blades; and a stone column. Although no complete stone vessels were found, their presence is demonstrated by five fragments made from brown-speckled white marble, discovered in Graves 7, 10 and 11. The copper-bronze objects have parallels with material from Kerman, Iranian Baluchistan, Central Asia and the Indo-Iranian borderlands (Hakemi 1997: 640, figs 11–16; Heydari *et al.* 2019: 54, pl. 21: 125/53). The small stone column and the copper-bronze compartmented seal, both found in Grave 11, have comparanda at other sites in Central Asia (Gonur, Toglok, Altyn Depe), Afghanistan (Dashly, Godar-i Shah, Hirdai-Tepe, Mundigak), Pakistan (Mehrgarh, Kulli, Sibri) and Iran (Shahdad, Damin, Susa, Hissar, Tureng, Shah Tepe and Shahr-i Sokhta), and should be regarded as evidence for connections with the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex cultures of north-eastern Iran and Central Asia (Schmidt 1937: fig. 61: H. 3250 & H. 1842; Hakemi 1997: 639 & figs 1–4; Boroffka & Sava 1998). For this reason, Grave 11 probably dates to the late third/early second millennium BC. Otherwise, the grave goods recovered from Bampur 14 belong to the Bampur I–IV periods, dated to the late fourth to mid-third millennium BC. Comparisons can also be established with Konar Sandal and Hajjiabad-Varamin, Spidej, Damin, Tepe Yahya IV<sub>C-B</sub>, Shahr-i Sokhta II–III, Spidej, Kech-Makran Late Period IIIa and Miri Qalat III<sub>b</sub> (de Cardi 1970; Lamberg-Karlovsky 1970; Tosi 1983; Sajjadi 2003; Besenval 2005; Besenval *et al.* 2005; Madjidzadeh & Pittman 2008; Didier 2013; Mutin 2013; Didier & Mutin 2015; Heydari *et al.* 2015; 2019; Mutin *et al.* 2017b; Eskandari *et al.* 2021).

## Conclusions

Most graves at Bampur 14 date to the late fourth to mid-third millennium BC, with one (11) probably belonging to the late third to early second millennium BC. Similarities between finds from this cemetery and other sites in the region show that the material culture of Bampur 14 belongs to a horizon extending from Kerman province to Pakistani Baluchistan (Fairservis 1961; Wright 1984, 1989). A nearby site, Qasemabad 4, with a similar ceramic assemblage, may be the settlement with which the Bampur 14 cemetery was associated.

## Acknowledgments

The authors are very grateful to Hossein Moradi for his guidance and help; Francois Desset for his comments and editing; the anonymous reviewers for their useful suggestions; and finally to John MacGinnis for his editing of the English.

## Funding statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency or from commercial and not-for-profit sectors.

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