



Explanation and Configuration of South Caucasus and Azerbaijan (NW Iran) Cultures during the Bronze and Iron Ages

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Abstract

The Khojaly-Gadabay (Xocali-Gədəbəy) culture is well-established in the archaeological literature of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Chronologically, it spans the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the Caucasus region, and Iron Ages I and II in northwest Iran. Within archaeological literature, this culture has various designations. In the Republic of Azerbaijan, it is known as Central Zaghafia and Ganja-Garabagh culture, while in Armenia it is referred to as Lechashen-Metsamor culture. However, the name Khojaly-Gadabay prevails due to its initial identification in this Azerbaijani region. Consequently, most archaeological data on this culture comes from cemeteries, with no settlements identified. This article utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on archaeological data and comparisons, to explore the culture's key characteristics. The study seeks to answer two fundamental questions: What are the essential archaeological features of this culture within the studied region? How can we explain the point of formation, origin, and spread of this culture? Unveiling these unknowns will provide a clearer understanding and a suitable foundation for studying this culture in northwest Iran.

Keywords: Caucasus, Northwest Iran, Cultural Configuration, Bronze and Iron Ages, Diffusion.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

In the second millennium BCE, tribes in the Republic of Azerbaijan, skilled in animal husbandry, agriculture, and metallurgy, emerged as dominant forces. Their archaeological remains, known as the Khojaly-Gadabay culture, have been discovered throughout the Republic of Azerbaijan. Archaeological investigations of this Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age period in the Republic of Azerbaijan, dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries, have a history of over a century, surpassing those of other eras. Cemeteries have been the primary focus of research on this culture, which derives its name from the Khojaly-Gadabay region in the Republic of Azerbaijan (Figure. 1) (Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 11).

The Khojaly-Gadabay culture, located in northwest Iran along the Aras River, has been

extensively studied through excavations at various sites, including the kurgans of Jafarabad in Mughan (Khodaafarin) (Iravani Ghadim 2009; Iravani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu 2013; Kiani *et al.* 2016), the Zardkhaneh area (Niknami and Kazempour 2013; Kazempour *et al.* 2013), the Larijan and Tuali cemeteries (Hejabari Nobari 2007), Dinkhah Tepe (Muscarella 1974), Goy Tepe (Brown 1951), and Hasanlu Tepe (Dyson and Muscarella 1989; Dyson 1965; Young 1956).

Cemetery excavations in the Aras River region have been particularly fruitful in revealing the characteristics of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture, including burial methods and archaeological artifacts such as pottery and metal objects. This research investigates the Khojaly-Gadabay culture in the Caucasus region and northwest Iran, drawing on data from recent excavations in the region's prehistoric cemeteries.



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Geographically, studies and explorations of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture have been conducted in:

- The Kura River Basin in Azerbaijan
- The Aras River region in northwest Iran
- Armenia

and engraved pottery (Bakhshaliyev 2004: 126). The architectural and structural remains at these sites include clay and river stone buildings, ash deposits around ovens, bone depots (Seyidov 2003: 180), and gray earthenware artifacts such as bowls, jars, pots, plates, and glasses.



Figure. 1: Map showing the study area(photo by Authors).1-Kurgans of Jafarabad of Mughan,2-Zardkhaneh, 3- Larijan & Tuali Cemetery, 4- Goy Tepe, 5- Boynu Tepe/ Qizqalasi, 6- Dinkhah Tepe, 7- Cordler Tepe, 8- Kul Tepe, 9-Kolani/Qarniyariq, 10- Yurdchu/Yurdcu, 11- Palidli, 12- Zayamchay ,13-Artik Cemetery, 14- Agarak, 15-Talin, 16-Aparan.(After : Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 12)

Khojaly-Gadabay Culture (Xocali-Gədəbəy) in the Republic of Azerbaijan

Emerging in 1450 BCE, the Khojaly-Gadabay culture became a prominent archaeological culture in the South Caucasus and neighboring regions. Archaeological studies of the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age in Azerbaijan have a history of over a century, primarily focusing on cemetery sites. One of the most significant sites associated with this culture is Kul Tepe I, inhabited from the Copper-Stone Age to the early Iron Age. The IV cultural layer, dating to the early Iron Age, has yielded valuable archaeological data (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 7). Another notable site is Kul Tepe II, located in Nakhchivan and excavated by Bakhshaliyev. This site has provided essential information about plain

A distinctive feature of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture is the "mushroom-shaped" appendage found on various types of bowls and pots (Seyidov 2003: 181). These appendages often have a smooth, flat, or spherical rim near the edge. As shown in Figure. 2, such features have been reported from the Garabağlar site (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 16), Kolani (Qarniyariq) with stump decorations (Bakhshaliyev 1998: 5), Yurdchu (Yurdcu), Zeyvə, Qumluq, and Dəmyələr (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 39).

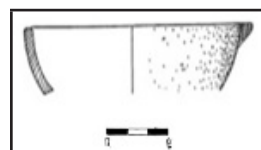


Figure. 2: Appendix-like earrings from Qarabaglar (After: Bakhshaliyev 2002: 85).

The Asiriq Çay area and the Seyidlar settlement are among the most intensively studied regions associated with the Khojaly-Gadabay culture. Spanning approximately 1.5 kilo metres, Asiriq Çay is situated near Bozalqanlı village (Museyibli *et al.* 2007: 4). Excavations in these areas have yielded a diverse range of pottery used for daily and household purposes. Their functions can be inferred from their shape, size, and decorative patterns.

The pottery from these sites includes jars, storage containers, cooking pots, and cups. Common decorations on these vessels consist of geometric motifs, primarily raised or deep lines, small rhombuses, wavy lines, horizontal lines, and dot-like patterns alongside straight lines. Some vessels feature a pinch handle or button-like handle, a characteristic feature of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture. Notably, all motifs are applied to the upper portion of the vessel, near the shoulder (Museyibli *et al.* 2007: 4).

The Khojaly-Gadabay culture pottery is categorized by archaeologists into two primary groups: wheel-made gray pottery and handmade pink or red well-baked patterned pottery. Patterned pottery production was prevalent during the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 40). Intense cultural exchanges between the Inscribed Pottery culture and the Khojaly-Gadabay culture during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age suggest a cultural and political union between these tribes and communities (Bakhshaliyev 1997: 37).

Cemetery finds associated with this culture often feature pottery adorned with geometric decorations, animal figures, celestial bodies, plants, and water motifs. These decorations have been studied more extensively than those from the Zayamchay cemetery. Notable motifs include mottled deer, ram-sheep heads created using the added method (Figure 3), sun imagery (Figure 4), horizontal hyacinth motifs, and representations of river water or rainfall (Figure 5) (Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 11-26).

Located in the Samux plain, the Seyidlar site was excavated in 2003. Archaeological remains dating to the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age were discovered at depths ranging from 40 to 80 centimetres. These findings included clay temper pottery with carved decorations, stone tools, and agricultural tools made of flint and obsidian. Among

the most significant cultural remains unearthed at this site were storage pots containing wheat seeds, oats, legumes such as sesame or onion, and the remnants of a furnace, found at a depth of 50 centimetres (Huseynova *et al.* 2004: 3-4)

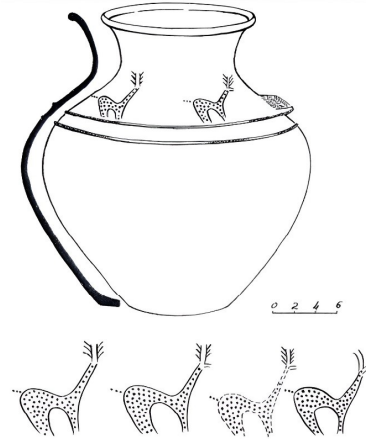


Figure 3: Decorations with ram/sheep heads from Zəyəm Çay cemetery (After: Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 21).

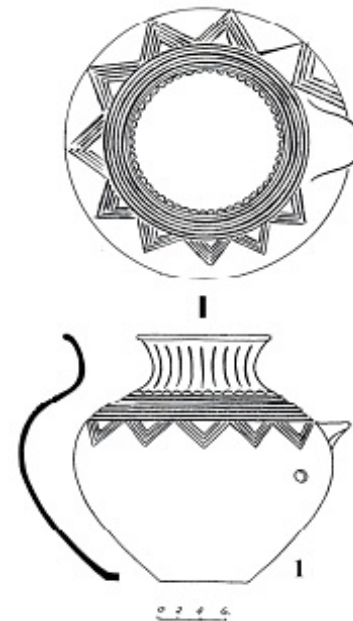


Figure 4: Picture of the sun from Zəyəm Çay cemetery (After: Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 24).

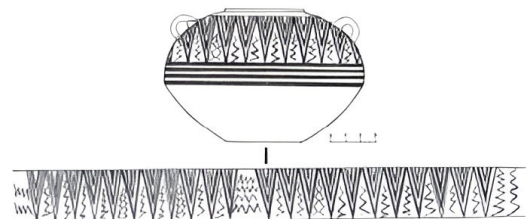


Figure 5: Lavender and water flow motifs from Zəyəm Çay Cemetery (After: Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 24)

Most burial gifts associated with the Khojaly-Gadabay culture include bronze artifacts, such as weapons and personal ornaments, reflecting the culture's advanced metalworking skills. Some bronze objects incorporate seashells and agate seeds, suggesting trade with distant regions. It appears that a series of religious ceremonies and rituals accompanied burials, often involving food and drink. Within some graves, the bones of squirrels, dogs, and horses have been found alongside the deceased, possibly reflecting religious beliefs (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 41).

Most cultural data related to the Khojaly-Gadabay culture is derived from cemetery excavations, which vary in shape. For instance, Shah Takhti Cemetery is square and box-shaped (Bakhshaliyev 1997: 33), Garabaghlar Cemetery is Kurgan-shaped (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 17), Sari Dara (Sari Dərə) I Cemetery is Kurgan-shaped (Seyidov 2003: 206), Bai Ahmed Cemetery is a stone box type (Novruzlu and Bakhshaliyev 1993: 16-33), Monjuqlu Tepe Cemetery is a stone box type (dromos) (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 49), Palidli Cemetery is earthen or simple graves (Jafarov and Jafarova 2015: 127-132), and Zayamchay (Zəyəmçay) Cemetery is catacomb-shaped (Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 11-23). These cemeteries yield valuable artifacts such as pottery and metal vessels, providing insights into the culture's material practices and daily life.

One of the noteworthy aspects of these cemeteries is the presence of secondary burials and evidence of altars or temples. Secondary burials

can be identified by examining collective burials, characterized by the absence of side stones in the tomb walls (Bakhshaliyev 2008: 263). Significant indicators of religious practices include the use of sacred spaces within residential areas, as evidenced by layer VIII of Kul Tepe I, which dates back to the Copper-Stone Age (Abibullayev 1982: 28). Additionally, the discovery of temples related to the early Bronze Age at Kul Tepe I and II, featuring ovens shaped like cow horns and horseshoes, further supports the existence of religious activities in these regions. Moreover, the use of sacred spaces within residential or burial areas prior to the Late Bronze and early Iron Eras suggests a longstanding tradition of religious practices (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 20).

In some cemeteries, such as Munjuqlu Tepe, each grave had a separate altar positioned at the entrance. These altars and graves typically measured 50 cm and 70-100 cm in depth (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 110-111). One of the significant religious sites associated with the Khojaly-Gadabay culture is Gegarut in Armenia, named after its excavator (Figure. 6). Within this temple, archaeologists discovered square stone objects, horned human clay figurines with cloak-like coverings, circular stone tools, pottery, ritual vessels, bone tools, personal ornaments, and a deer antler used for cutting (Badalyan *et al.* 2008: 61-65).

The objects recovered from the altars and graves include clay vessels, decorative items such as pots, teapots, glasses, handled pots, bowls, bangles, rings,



Figure 6: General view of the temple from Gegarut
(After: Badalyan *et al.* 2008:61 65).

earrings, piercing tools, bayonets, and daggers (Seyidov 2003: 213). On the wall of one grave in the Kolani cemetery, two facing stones depicted two distinct images. The first image, portraying a man on horseback, was carved onto a trapezoidal stone tablet resembling a stele. The human head features a circular hole with a leaf-like appendage. Above and below the rider, images of the moon and a snake, respectively, can be observed. The second image depicts a human figure divided into two parts with a horn-like appendage and a circular hole (Figure .7). Researchers believe that the circles with dot-like holes symbolize the sun's role. Similar images can be found on clay vessels associated with the Khojaly-Gadabay culture in Azerbaijan (Bakhshaliyev 1998: 2-4) and in the petroglyphs of Qobustan, Gəmi Qaya, and Katunchay (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 43).

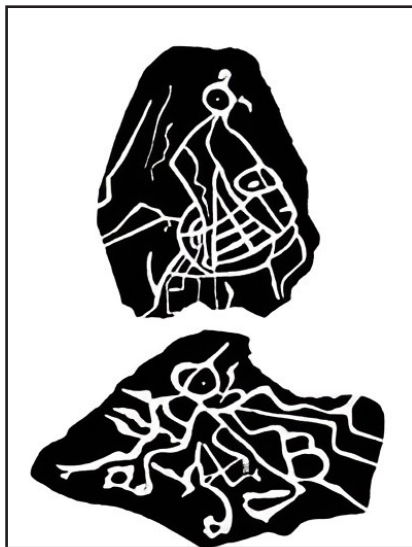


Figure 7: Images of carved on one of the graves
(After: Bakhshaliyev 2002:104)

There have been no reported instances of temples or altars in the cemeteries and surrounding areas of northwestern Iran. One exception to this is the discovery of a well at Boynu Tepe or Qizqalasi, located in the village of Hamidan Qara Dagħ. This well is believed to have been used for offerings and gifts by the inhabitants (Ayorloo and Asgarpour 2013: 1-12).

Northwest Iran: Khojaly-Gadabay Culture

The Khojaly-Gadabay culture in northwest Iran, particularly along the banks of the Aras River, has been extensively studied through excavations at various sites and cemeteries, including Jafarabad

Khodaafarin Kurgans, Larijan Cemetery, Tuali Sofla Cemetery, Zardkhaneh Site, and Boynu Tepe. These sites have been explored based on burial methods, archaeological data, and cultural studies. Due to their recent excavation and examination, these cemeteries are crucial for understanding the Khojaly-Gadabay culture. Moreover, their significance is amplified by the ongoing excavation and study of newly discovered sites and cemeteries in the Caucasus region. Chronological and bilateral studies complement each other in this regard.

Jafarabad Kurgans are located in the northern part of Qara Dagħ in East Azerbaijan province. During a surface survey in 2009, 40 kurgans were identified within a 5-kilometer area in Khodaafarin city. Eight of these kurgans were excavated in 2010 under the supervision of Mr. Irvani Ghadim. These kurgans represent unique examples of architecture from nomadic and migrant tribes (Irvani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu 2013: 34). Archaeological findings from these kurgans include pottery such as bowls, pots, cauldrons, drinking troughs, jugs, and tallow burners (Figure. 8).



Figure 8: Pottery obtained from Jafarabad Kurgan
(After: Irvani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu 2013: 46-47)

The decorations on the earthenware artifacts found at these sites include geometric, plant, and human motifs, often combined with added methods, incised or linear motifs, and polishing (Irvani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu 2013: 46-47). Metal objects recovered from these excavations include daggers, bayonets, knives, and spears, which can be categorized as defensive or offensive

weapons based on their intended use (Kiani *et al.* 2016: 8-12). In addition to Jafarabad, kurgan-type burials have been reported in the Zardkhaneh area (Niknami and Kazempour 2013) and Larijan and Tuali cemeteries (Hejabari Nobari 2007). Previous studies have identified pit burials in the Dinkhah Tepe area (Hamlin 1974: 125-132) and Yanik Tepe (Burney 1961: 138-153), as well as burials in tombs constructed of raw clay from Yanik Tepe and Kordlar Tepe (Lippert 1977).

The Larijan and Tuali Khomarlu cemeteries, situated near the Qara Dagh forests, are among the key archaeological sites associated with the Khojaly-Gadabay culture in northwest Iran. These cemeteries were excavated in 2016 by Hejabari Nobari, revealing rich kurgan-type burial mounds. Through the excavation and study of these cemeteries, the architectural structure of kurgan-type graves and the burial practices within them were clarified. The cultural data obtained primarily consists of terracotta vessels and bronze objects. Human burials in these cemeteries were often accompanied by animal burials, including horse bones, sheep, horned goats, snakes, and turtles.

A unique feature of these cemeteries was the presence of a wall separating human and animal burials (Hejabari Nobari 2007: 42-165). The ancient site of Boynu Tepe, located on the banks of the Aras River, has been investigated through the study of a grave pile found in borehole 5. In addition to the grave pile, a well was discovered. This well is believed to have been used for offerings and gifts. The data obtained from the grave mound include clay vessels, ash, broken clay vessels, bronze objects, and the bones of cows and sheep from the offering pit.

The pottery tradition of the Khodaafarin area (south of the Aras River), as noted by the Boynu Tepe explorers, exhibits native and local characteristics comparable to the Iron Age pottery tradition of Garabaq or the Khojaly-Gadabay culture in the South Caucasus (Ajorloo and Askarpour 2013: 1-8). Archaeological data from sites and cemeteries in northwest Iran demonstrate a striking similarity to the cultural data of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture in terms of pottery types and common patterns, as well as metal artifacts.

A distinctive feature of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture is the decoration of pottery vessels with animal heads, particularly ram's heads. This

decoration, dating back to the Iron Age II, has been found at the Goy Tepe site (Figure. 9) (Brown 1951: 141-175). The decoration of dishes with animal heads, including cows, horses, and other animals, is also prevalent in bronze and clay objects (Mirzaei *et al.* 2013: 92).

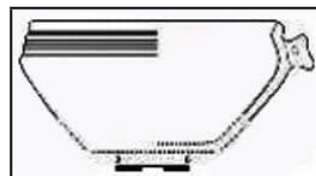


Figure. 9: Pottery with the head of a ram obtained from Goy tepe (After: Brown 1951: 138-163).

Pottery with relief decorations featuring animal heads, such as rams or cows, has been found at the Zayamchay cemetery in Azerbaijan (Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 11). The use of a button-like addition as a handle, as seen in Larijan cemetery (Figure. 10), and the presence of two holes near the rim and a crescent moon in a prominent or worm-shaped form within the bowls are characteristic features of this culture. Similar pottery bowls have been discovered at Dinkhah Tepe (Figure.11) (Muscarella 1974: 35-49) and Kordlar Tepe (Figure .12) (Lippert 1977: 6-174).

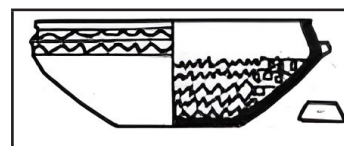


Figure. 10: Pottery with the addition button-like obtained from Larijan cemetery (After: Hejabari Nobari 2007: 141).

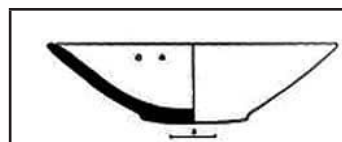


Figure. 11: The pattern of the crescent moon and two holes prominently from Dinkhah tepe (After: Lippert 1977: 138-160).

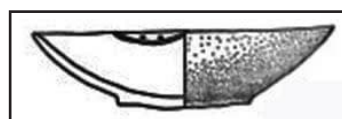


Figure. 12: Holes made in pottery from Cordler tepe (After: Muscarella 1974: 45-47).

Armenia: the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages

In Armenia, archaeological sites dating to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages are often located on the slopes of mountains or within fortified castles. The cultural data associated with this period has been primarily derived from cemetery excavations. Notably, much of our knowledge comes from the study of pottery, including pots, jars, bowls, pithos, and amphorae in various colours such as gray, black, yellow-brown, and red (Badalyan and Avestisyan 2007: 25-55).

The decorations on these dishes are primarily located on the upper portion and consist of geometric motifs. These motifs include point decorations found at the Aparan II cemetery and zigzag decorations, lines, and bands on pottery from the Artik cemetery. The diagonal patterns (Figure. 13) are created using carving and burning techniques (Badalyan and Avestisyan 2007: 51-55).

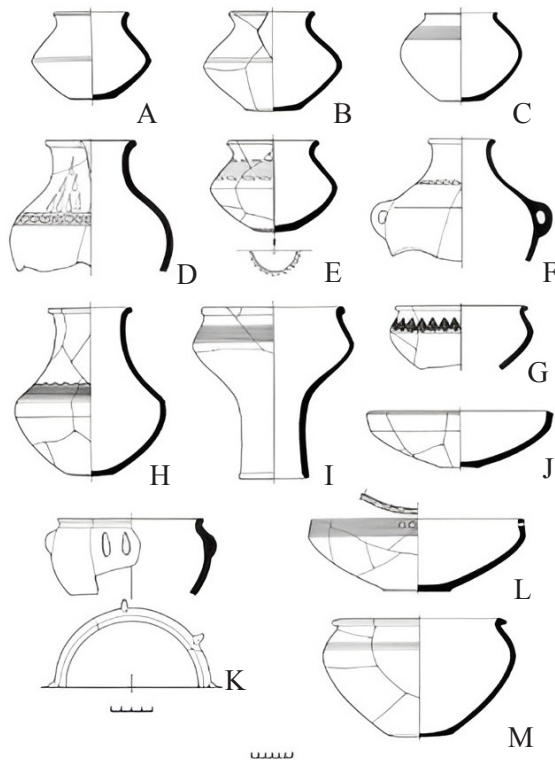


Figure 13: The Potteries from Artik Cemetery
(After: Badalyan et al. 2008: 70).

In Armenian archaeology, the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cultures hold significant importance compared to other historical periods. These cultures are prevalent in various regions of Armenia, including Shirak and Northeast Armenia

(Issian). Khankikyan has conducted research on the sonic region (Khankikyan 2002). However, to date, there is no comprehensive distribution map of ancient sites and areas in Armenia.

Until recently, there had been no systematic cartography for Armenia (Badalyan and Avestisyan 2007: 7). In recent years, however, advanced cartography projects have been conducted in the Tsakahuit plain and the southern shores of Sevan Lake (Avestisyan *et al.* 2000: 24). Research on the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cultures in Armenia has gained momentum in the last decade. Notable sites and areas associated with these cultures include Agarak, Talin, Aparan, Artik, Gegarot, Kantaghbyur, Ketu, Khoja Bagher, Kuchak, Mantash, Mastara, Shirakavan, Anushavan, and Teshghkahovit (Badalyan and Avestisyan 2007: 8).

The studied cemeteries in Armenia exhibit various architectural plans. The Aparan II cemetery, for example, is rectangular in shape (stone box) (Figure.14). Due to the volcanic nature of the region's rocks, the stones used in these cemeteries are primarily basalt. Interestingly, some graves did not contain human skeletal remains. The burial method observed at the Artik cemetery is catacomb-shaped, characterized by chambers dug into the tuff layers with public access shafts (Figure. 15).

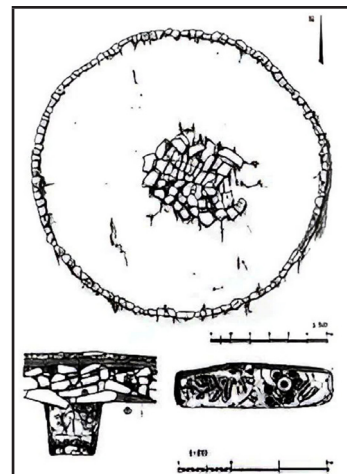


Figure 14: plan of Aparan Cemetery
(After: Badalyan and Avestisyan 2007: 51)

Another burial method commonly found in these regions is the kurgan form, as observed at Gegarot and Lechashen. The kurgans at Gegarot were oriented along the northeast-southwest axis, and the burial pits were covered with horseshoe-

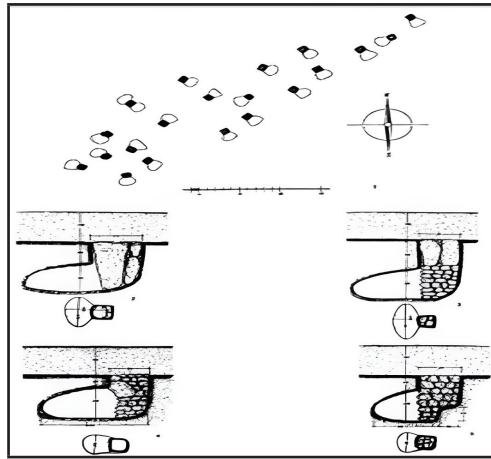


Figure 15: Plan of catacomb tombs from Artik Cemetery
(After: Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007: 66).

shaped stones made of tuff. Archaeological finds within these burial chambers included animal skeletons (sheep, goats, ribs, mammals, horse skulls), pottery, metal objects, and stone artifacts. The cultural data from the Gegarot cemetery aligns with the Lechashen-Metsamor I culture. Lechashen Cemetery, a significant site associated with the Lechashen-Metsamor culture, was investigated and excavated in 2005. The Lechashen Kurgans had a diameter of 15.70 metres and a height of 1.20 metres. The term "Lechashen-Metsamor" is used to categorize the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age cultures in Armenia, spanning from Lechashen-Metsamor I to Lechashen-Metsamor V and chronologically extending from 1500 BCE to 800 BCE (Lindsay and Greene 2013: 695) (Table. 1).

Table 1: List of Sites and Cemeteries of Bronze and Iron Ages in Studing Area (Authors).

| Sites & Cemeteries of Bronze and Iron Ages in | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|----------------------|
| North West of Iran (Azerbaijan) | | | |
| Name of Sites | Period | References | Settlement /Cemetery |
| Boynu tepe or Qizqalasi | Iron Age | (Ayorloo and Asgarpour 2013: 1-12) | Settlement |
| kurgans of Jafarabad of Mughan | Iron Age | (Iravani Ghadim and Mamizadeh Giglu 2013) | Cemetery |
| Larijan and Tuali cemetery | Iron Age | (Hejabari Nobari 2007) | Cemetery |
| Zardkhaneh | Iron Age | (Niknami and Kazempour 2013) | Settlement /Cemetery |
| Goy Tepe | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Brown 1951) | Settlement |
| Dinkhah Tepe | Iron Age | (Muscarella 1974: 35-49) | Settlement |
| Kordlar Tepe | Iron Age | (Lippert 1977: 6-174) | Settlement |
| Republic of Azerbaijan | | | |
| Kul Tepe I (Kul t p  I) | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 7) | Settlement |
| Kul Tepe II (Kul t p  II) | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Bakhshaliyev 2004: 126) | Settlement |
| Kolani (Qarniyariq) | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev 1998: 5) | Settlement |
| Yurdchu (Yurd u) | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev and Maro, 2015: 39) | Settlement |
| Zeyv  | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 39) | Settlement |
| Qumluq | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 39) | Settlement |
| D my l r | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev and Maro 2015: 39) | Settlement |
| Seyidlar | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Museyibli <i>et al.</i> 2007: 4) | Settlement |
| Zayamchay (Z y m  ay) | Iron Age | (Museyibli and Akhundova 2013: 11-26) | Cemetery |
| Shah Takhti cemetery | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev 1997: 33) | Cemetery |
| Garabaghlar cemetery | Iron Age | (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 17) | Cemetery |
| Sari dara (Sari D r ) I cemetery | Iron Age | (Seyidov 2003: 206) | Cemetery |
| Monjuqlu Tepe cemetery | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Bakhshaliyev 2002: 49) | Cemetery |
| Palidli cemetery | Iron Age | (Jafarov and Jafarova 2015: 127-132) | Cemetery |
| Armenia | | | |
| Artik cemetery | Bronze and Iron Ages | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007: 51-55) | Cemetery |
| Agarak | Iron Age | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007:8) | Settlement |
| Talin | Iron Age | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007:8) | Settlement |
| Aparan | Iron Age | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007: 51) | Settlement |
| Lechashen | Iron Age | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007:8) | Cemetery |
| Kuchak | Iron Age | (Badalyan and Avetisyan 2007:8) | Settlement |
| Gegarot cemetery | Iron Age | (Lindsay and Greene 2013: 695) | Cemetery |

The Khojaly-Gadabay Culture: A Comparative Analysis

Toward the end of the second millennium BCE, in the western region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, clans and communities involved in agriculture and animal husbandry emerged as prominent groups. The archaeological and cultural data associated with these societies are collectively referred to as the "Khojaly-Gadabay Culture" in Azerbaijani archaeological literature. This culture has been extensively studied in the geographical area of northwest Iran, particularly along the banks of the Aras River. Excavations at sites and cemeteries such as Jafar Abad Khoda Afarin, Larijan Cemetery, and Tuali Sofla Cemetery have provided valuable insights into both burial practices and ancient data.

Given the recent excavation and investigation of the aforementioned sites, they hold significant importance in the archaeological study of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture. Their value is further enhanced by the ongoing excavation and study of newly discovered sites and cemeteries in the Caucasus region, as these complementary efforts provide a broader perspective from both chronological and bilateral viewpoints.

In the archaeological literature of the Caucasus region, archaeological data from the 800-1450 BCE era is classified as belonging to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. This cultural period, spanning the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, corresponds chronologically to the second half of the second millennium BCE. In the archaeological literature of the Republic of Azerbaijan, this culture is known as the "Khojaly-Gadabay" culture. Chronologically, the Late Bronze Age in northwestern Iran dates back to 2000-1500 BCE, while in the Caucasus region it is dated to 1150/1250-1450/1500 BCE. It is noteworthy that the Late Bronze Age in the Caucasus region is equivalent to the Iron Age I in Iran.

One of the defining characteristics of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture is the production of gray pottery with carved decorations and bronze objects. Archaeologists attribute these artistic practices, including burial rituals and metalworking, to indigenous tribes. In terms of shape and form, the graves associated with this culture vary widely, encompassing stone boxes, kurgan-shaped graves in mountainous areas, simple graves, earthen graves (graves dug into the soil), and pit graves in plains. These graves were typically constructed of

clay, and burials were performed both collectively and individually. While collective and secondary burials were common in the residential areas of the Caucasus region, clay-structured burials have not been discovered in this region.

Kurgan and stone-box burials are found in two distinct geographical areas: non-residential and cemetery sites. These burial types are commonly reported in foothill regions and around castles. The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cemeteries in the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran are relatively well-identified and serve as valuable sources for studying social classes, economic conditions, and spiritual beliefs.

Based on the discovery of unsettled cemeteries on mountain slopes and mountainous areas, alongside settled areas in the lowlands, archaeologists have concluded that the Khojaly-Gadabay culture had a semi-nomadic lifestyle. The inhabitants of mountainous areas primarily engaged in livestock breeding and agriculture. In addition to these activities, those living in the lowlands were involved in metalworking. The presence of metal artifacts, including ornaments, tools, weapons, daily necessities, and the discovery of pottery workshops, kilns, and metallurgy facilities supports this claim.

Another crucial aspect within the scope of spirituality and religion is the construction and use of temples. The use of temples was a significant requirement for the Khojaly-Gadabay culture, as evidenced by the discovery of squirrel, dog, and horse bones alongside human remains in some burial graves. In addition, the presence of altars, platforms, and mixed soil covering the upper parts of graves, along with pottery fragments, is interpreted by archaeologists as a sign of burial rituals involving reception. Temples were sometimes built within settlement areas, and at other times, they were located near cemeteries or unsettled areas, suggesting both residential and cemetery-based worship practices.

The study of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture sheds light on previously unexplored aspects of Bronze and Iron Ages archaeology in the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran. Despite significant progress, numerous questions remain unanswered, such as the cultural influences that succeeded the Khojaly-Gadabay culture after the end of the Iron Age. Addressing these unknowns could open up new avenues of archaeological research.

Conclusion

The Khojaly-Gadabay culture, a prominent archaeological culture of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran, has been extensively studied through excavations at numerous sites. This culture is characterized by its distinctive burial practices, material artifacts, and cultural rituals.

Key findings include the discovery of various types of graves, such as kurgan-shaped and stone box graves, as well as a wide range of artifacts including pottery, metal objects, and stone tools. The culture's religious practices are evident in the presence of temples, altars, and burial rituals involving offerings and animal sacrifices.

The Khojaly-Gadabay culture demonstrates a rich and complex society with strong ties to its environment and neighboring regions. Further research into this culture can provide valuable insights into the history and development of the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran during this significant period.

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