PERSPECTIVES ON THE STRUCTURAL TYPOLOGY OF THE LATE BRONZE-IRON AGE GRAVES IN IRANIAN AZERBAIJAN

İRAN AZERBAYCAN'DA GEÇ BRONZ-DEMİR ÇAĞI MEZARLARININ YAPISAL TİPOLOJİSİ ÜZERİNE PERSPEKTİFLER

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ABSTRACT

The Bronze and Iron periods mark a move towards further deepening of social and cultural complexities, which eventually would culminate in the rise of early states in northwest Iran. The advent in this period of the extramural cemeteries also gives rise to speculations over the types of communities, convictions, and religious orientations of the contemporary populations. In these cemeteries, the structure of the graves and their burial goods convey concepts and symbols that can help shed some light on part of the questions regarding the culture of the associated populations. Architectural data are available from dozens of burial grounds thus far investigated in Iranian Azerbaijan. Excavations at these places have identified a wide range of similarities and dissimilarities in their placement as well as the structure, construction materials, and burial goods of their graves. Drawing on the excavated data, the present paper is an attempt to appraise the mortuary customs with a special focus on the types of structures of graves in the late Bronze-Iron period. The results reveal a great variability in the form and structure of the burials, to the extent that occasionally two or three different grave types occur at a single cemetery. The exact determining factors for these discrepancies and their scope still elude us as no conclusive evidence exist at present to advance any tenable hypothesis, and one can simply offer some conjectures in this regard. Yet, geography, belief systems, social, economic and political statuses of the buried, and ethnicity were in all probability some of the key factors at work in the emergence of such varied grave architectures.

Keywords: Late Bronze, Iron age, Graves Typology, Iranian Azerbaijan.

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ÖZET

Bronz ve Demir çağları, kuzeybatı İran'daki erken devletlerin yükselişiyle sonuçlanacak olan sosyal ve kültürel karmaşıklıkların daha da derinleşmesine yönelik bir hareketi işaret etmektedir. Bu dönemde, şehir dışı mezarlıklarının ortaya çıkışı, aynı zamanda, çağdaş nüfusun topluluk, inanç ve din yönelim tipleri hakkında spekülasyonlara yol açmaktadır. Mezarlıklarda bulunan mezarların yapısı ve gömü eşyaları, ilgili toplulukların kültürüyle ilgili soruların bir kısmına ışık tutmaya yardımcı olabilecek kavram ve semboller taşımaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra İran Azerbaycan'ında incelenmiş düzinelerce mezarlık alanlarından elde edilmiş mimari veriler bulunmaktadır. Bu yerlerde yapılan kazılarda, mezarların yerleşimi, yapısı, inşaat malzemeleri ve gömme eşyalarında çok geniş ve çeşitli benzerlikler ile aynı zamanda farklılıklar tespit edilmiştir. Kazı verilerinden yola çıkan bu makale, özellikle geç Bronz-Demir çağındaki mezar yapı tiplerine odaklanarak gömü geleneklerini değerlendirmeye yöneliktir. Sonuçlar, bazen tek bir mezarlıkta iki veya üç farklı mezar tipinin ortaya çıkması şeklinde, definlerin biçim ve yapısında büyük bir çeşitlilik olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu tutarsızlıklar ve kapsamlar için kesin belirleyici faktörler hala anlaşılmamakta olup, şu anda herhangi bir savunulabilir hipotezi ileri sürmek için kesin bir kanıt bulunmadığından, bu konuda basit bazı varsayımlarda bulunulabilmektedir. Yine de gömülenlerin bulunduğu coğrafya, inanç sistemleri, sosyal, ekonomik, politik durumlar ve etnik kökenin tamamı olasılıkla bu kadar çeşitli mezar mimarisinin ortaya çıkmasında kilit faktörlerden bazıları olmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geç Tunç, Demir Çağı, Mezar Tipolojisi, İran Azerbaycanı.

INTRODUCTION

Reconstruction of the social life of early man is contingent on having detailed information about the various facets of his life, and grave architecture, nature of burial objects, body treatment, and burial remains are some of the major archaeological resources of a society that can help gain the required insight[1]. From the prehistory to the present time, varying attitudes towards death have caused diverse patterns in the architecture of graves and their burial goods, evincing the ways in which man thought of the phenomenon of death. What is suggested by the mortuary practices is the fact that the phenomenon was of particular importance, and that the qualitative and quantitative diversity seen in grave architecture and ornaments, burial goods, and burial positions echo differences in belief systems, social and political organizations, economic ties, and subsistence modes between different cultures[2].

The late Bronze and early Iron period witnessed dramatic transformations in ancient societies, represented most conspicuously by the technological advances in pottery, tools and metal objects, and emergence of monumental architectural plans. Other notable changes concerned burial customs on the Iranian plateau and most parts of Western Asia as the arrival of urbanism put a permanent end to the long lasting tradition of intramural burial, supplanting it with interring the dead in discrete extramural cemeteries, which generally lay beyond the settled areas.

Numerous surveys and excavations at the Iron Age cemeteries of northwest Iran have produced a large body of data, which have so far been treated at the level of individual sites and have rarely been used in an integrated, holistic research on the typology of graves structure. Thus, the present paper, adapting a comparative approach, seeks to embark on a broad classification of the different grave types in terms of their building materials and structural forms, building on all major field investigations that have so far covered the region. The material for the study comes from several surveys and excavations in the east and west quarters of Iranian Azerbaijan, with the most notable sites such as Hasanlu[3], Haftavan[4], Dinkha[5], Geoy (Gök) Tepe[6], Yanik Tepe[7], Göy (Gök) Masjid (Masjed-e Kabud/Blue Mosque)[8], Se-Girdan[9], Jafarabad[10], Khorramabad[11], Zard Khaneh[12], Shahar Yeri[13], Khangah of Gilavan[14], and Boynu Yogun[15] (Fig. 1).

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

Human societies and natural geography form two major constituent components of a landscape. Landscape is a natural but also a cultural phenomenon, a fact that reflects the importance of the geography and the link of archaeology and geography as scientific disciplines. Favorable climate and geographical setting were of the major factors contributing to the genesis and growth of human communities[16]. Generally speaking, northwest Iran encompasses the historical region of Iranian Azerbaijan, today bounded by the Republic of Azerbaijan to the north, Turkey and Iraq to the west, central Zagros to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the west. Here, the two ranges of Zagros and Alborz meet, thus the designation the Azerbaijan Knot. The region is the convergence of the three plateaus of Iran, Armenia, and Anatolia, and this very fact is responsible for the complicated and irregular nature of the regional uplands[17]. The uplands of Azerbaijan serve as a natural shield and are separated from the Caucasian mountains by the Aras valley to the north; and to the west lies the snowcapped Mount Ararat. Though the two borders are deemed natural barriers, none has formed a geomorphological boundary as the same terrain continues beyond both. To the west, the northwest highlands are evidently bounded by the Talesh Mountains, while to the south there is no clear boundary with the neighboring regions. Within the inner region lie the dispersed and irregular ranges of Qaradagh, Qoshadagh, and Sabalan (Savalan) in central north, Qaflan Kuh in the east, and Sahand in the center. It contains the two major basins of the Caspian Sea and the Lake Urmia with several copious rivers. Configurationally, the region is characterized by diverse topography. Climate is somehow affected by the external factors such as the Mediterranean wet currents from the west and southwest, and the Siberian cold air masses from the north as well as a series of internal and peripheral factors, including the Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea, each leaving a profound impact on the climate of their coastal areas[18].

1 Dark 2000: 111–116.
2 Pearson 1999: 5.
3 Dyson and Muscarella 1989.
4 Burney 1970; 1972; 1973; 1975.
5 Muscarella 1968, 1974.
6 Brown 1951.
7 Burney 1961; 1962; 1964.
8 Hejebri 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003.
9 Muscarella 1969.
10 Iravani 2010.
11 Rezalou 2011.
12 Niknami and Kazempour 2011.
13 Hejebri 2004; 2005.
14 Rezalou 2006.
15 Pourfaraj 2012.
16 Naseri *et al*. 2015: 85.
17 Alaie 2009: 23.
18 Raisnia 1989: 19; Khamachi 1991: 38–41.

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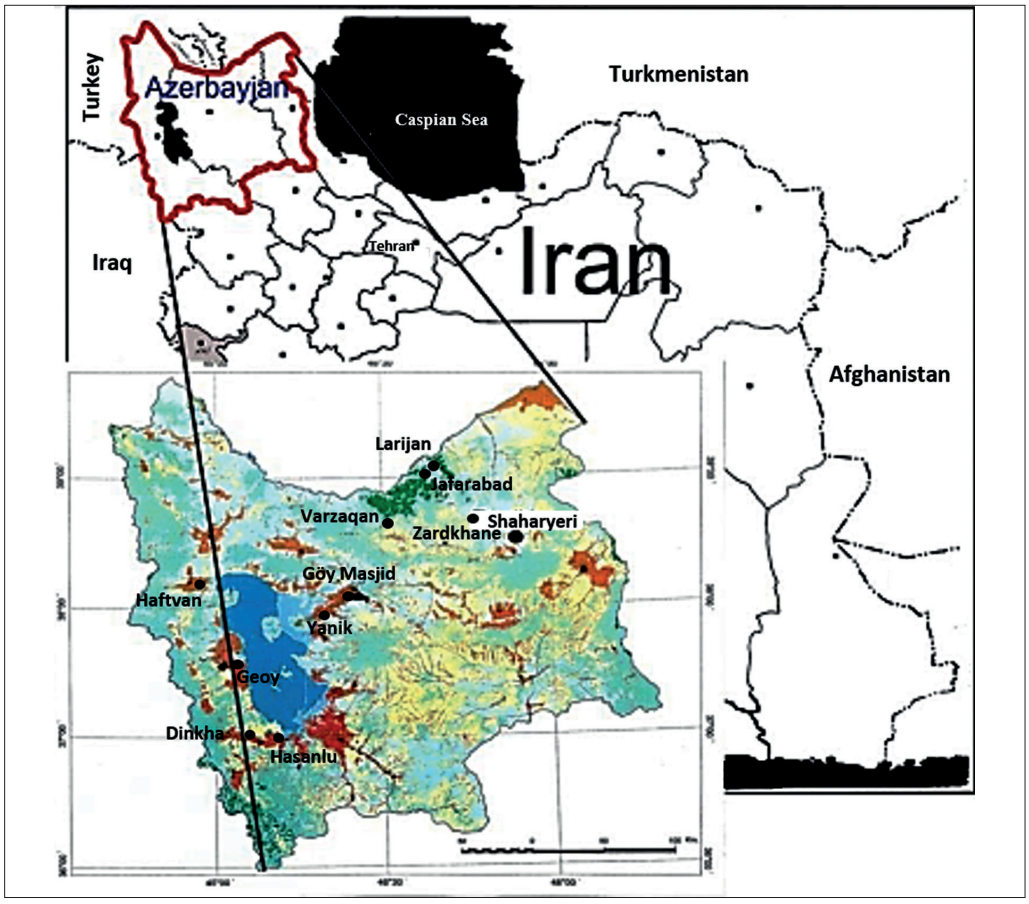

Figure 1. Map of sites mentioned in the text (After Kazempour et al 2012: 167). / *Metinde bahsedilen yerleşimleri gösteren harita*

LATE BRONZE AND IRON PERIODS OF NORTHWEST IRAN

The bronze and Iron ages are among the most momentous and complicated cultural periods in Iran and notably Azerbaijan due to various episodes of migrations, rise of earliest states, discovery of new metals, and substantially changed character of interactions. The respective sites are primarily characterized by a grey/black ware, spouted vessels, absence or dearth of painted wares, extramural cemeteries, and occurrence of Iron artifacts. Multiple studies have covered the period, in particular its cultural and social implications in northwest Iran. While the Lake Urmia Basin was the prime focus of the earlier works on the Iron Age Iran, the east and north quadrants of northwest Iran have also received scholarly attention in the recent decades, resulting to the identification there of related cultures and sites. Various chronologies have been proposed for the period in the region in question by different archaeologists, each drawing on their own studies. Notable instances include those by T. Cuyler Young (1965), R.H. Dyson[19], I. Medvedskaya (1982), and M. Danti (2013). Many have cited the year 1450 BC as the beginning point for the period. In his recent reappraisal of the late Bronze-Iron period in northwest Iran, Danti has assigned 1450–1250 BC to have been as the late bronze, 1250–1050 BC as the Iron I, 1050–800 BC as the Iron II, and 800–550 BC as the Iron III[20] periods respectively.

BURIAL TYPOLOGY

Most analyses in archaeology hinge on the typology of a given phenomenon. The points of importance in typological analyses include, among others, the selection of a proper and adequate sample, and the study of either the whole sample or simply part of it in a way that can be applied to its entirety. Accordingly, in this study we attempt to include in our typological classifications all major cemeteries that are currently known across northwest Iran, both in the lowlands of the Lake Urmia basin and the eastern and northern highlands.

One may base the classification of the late Bronze and Iron II burials into some comparable and inclusive categories on different attributes such as building materials, grave form,

[19] Dyson and Muscarella 1989.

[20] Danti 2013: 336–369.

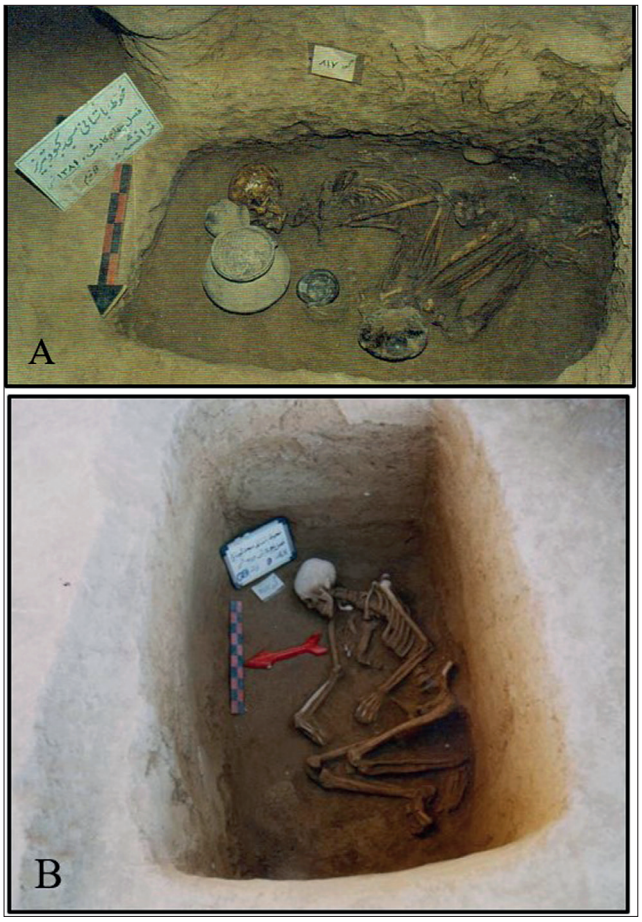

Figure 2. Simple pits at the cemetery of Göy Masjid (Hejebri 2002). / *Basit mezarlar, Göy Mescid*

Figure 3. Stone mass overlying a simple inhumation with pise (chineh)-lined edge at the cemetery of Göy Masjid (Hejebri 2003). / *Taş kütle içine basit gömü, Göy Mescidi mezarlığı.*

burial position, and the gender of the buried. However, grave form appears as the most promising as it entails greater study variables and is easily and reliably measureable even through surface surveys. The contemporaneous burials mostly have stone and bricks as raw materials, though rare cases used *pise (chineh)*[21] and wood (as top cover)[22] or took the form of jar burials[23]. Reported burial positions often include squatting, fetal and, occasionally, supine and secondary burial, with the sex having nothing to do with it. The skeletons are usually associated with food such as goat and sheep meat alongside an assortment of objects, notably ceramic vessels of various forms (containing food), ornaments in stone, metal and bone, and assorted weaponry, which mirror a series of ritual and non-ritual values shared by the contemporary peoples[24].

SIMPLE PIT

The ubiquitous simple pit burials occur at almost all the cemeteries so far excavated in Iran. As the size of the pit was a function of the size of corpus, and the number

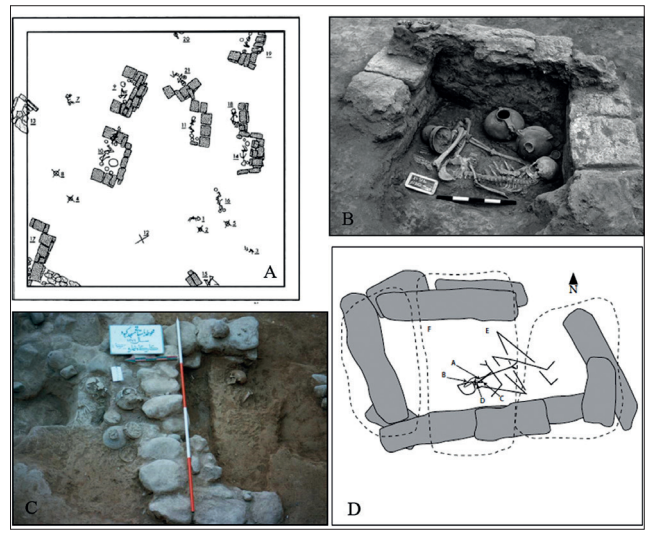

Figure 4. a) Cemetery of Dinkha III (Muscarella 1974: 38); b) Brick grave at Dinkha (Ibid: 64), c) Stone grave at the cemetery of Göy Masjid (Hejebri 2000), d) An Iron I stone grave at Hasanlu (Danti 2013: 287). / *Dinkha Mezarlığı III (Muscarella 1974: 38); b) Dinkha'daki tuğla mezar (Ibid: 64), c) Göy Mescid'in mezarlığındaki taş mezar (Hejebri 2000), d) Hasanlu'da bir demir taş mezarı (Danti 2013: 287).*

[21] Hejebri 2003: 84.
[22] Hejebri 2007: 211.
[23] Muscarella 1974, 58.
[24] Talai 2010: 114.

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and placement of burial goods, these graves fluctuate in dimensions, to the extent that it is hard to find pairs of inhumations in similar dimensions even at a single cemetery. They often contain single skeletons, though very rare cases of double burials are also attested. Sometimes the top or the edge of the pit show very simple stone lining, or the pit is sealed by cobbles forming a small "heap." Related graves have been recorded in the cemetery of Göy Masjid[25], Haftavan[26], Dinkha III, II[27], Hasanlu[28], Geoy tepe[29], Kordlar[30], and Khangah of Gilavan[31] as well as in the surveys of Ardabil[32]. In areas further east, similar graves occur in Gilan on the Caspian littoral at such cemeteries as Mianrud, and Marian[33] (Fig. 2-3).

SEMI-RECTANGULAR GRAVES

This type is represented by graves in semi-rectangular form, which are open on one or three sides. In other words, walls mainly composed of stone, brick and very rarely *pise (chineh)* were constructed on one to three sides, with the remaining lacking in any sort of structure. Their walls usually show an angle of hade that makes their tracing rather difficult[34]. Floor usually lies at a lower level than the base of the walls. Related graves are primarily attested in the Lake Urmia Basin at Dinkha III, II[35] (Fig. 4a-b), Göy Masjid[36] (Fig. 4c), Hasanlu[37] (Fig. 4d), and Yanik Tepe[38]. They are hitherto unreported from the eastern and northern uplands.

RECTANGULAR GRAVES

These graves are rectangular or oblong in plan and are of greater height compared with all types covered in this study. Once a pit of desired dimensions was dug, all four sides were lined with dry laid cobbles and rubbles (in differing manners), and the top was sealed with slabs that usually rested on the long walls. Next to these burials occasionally occur stela (menhirs) between 1 to 5 meter high[39] (Fig. 8a-b). In some cases, two or more bodies are seen within a single grave. Sometimes only two long sides contain built walls[40]. Two recorded walls fall into two classes: 1) one with smaller stones laid in interlocking fashion, 2) the other with large rubbles but in limited number. Structurally, the rectangular graves are differentiated simply by the shape of the stones used. In the upland areas where fairly large sheeted rocks abound, all four sides were walled with single slabs installed upright. Slabs applied as top covering extend all through the pit width to sit on the longitudinal walls. These graves have a lesser width than those lined with rubbles, and the main reason would have been the absence of stones with desired mass and dimensions. Related burials come from almost all corners of northwest Iran, notable among them are included Qala Khosrow[41], Shahar Yeri[42], Boynu Yogun[43] (Fig. 5a-b), and Zard Khaneh[44] as well as the sites recorded in the surveys of Varzeqan of Qaradagh[45] and Ardabil[46]. They were common in the Talesh region at such sites as Marian[47], as were in Caucasia and Anatolia at Shah Takhti II[48] and Shah Bulagh[49], only to name but a few.

In still other sub-type of these graves, the top covering was overlaid with a soil layer, and the grave surface was marked with medium size cobblestones, giving it a two-story appearance. In Qaradagh, relevant burials have been recorded as both isolated graves and groups of adjoining burials sharing side walls[50] (Fig. 5c-d).

Cists can also be placed in the broader category of rectangular graves in virtue of their square form. Yet, they have the smallest dimensions within the whole category, and at each side feature one or, at most, two flat stone slabs. This sub-category is attested at the very limited number of cemeteries in Qaradagh[51] (Fig. 5e-f). Related burials occur at Shah Takhti of Nakhichevan[52], in the Lake Van region[53], and in eastern Anatolia at such sites as Dilkaya[54].

Other sub-type concerns chamber tombs. These are in the form of a chamber defined by walls consisting of several courses of, usually flat, interlocked or simply superimposed, stones in the form of house walls. They display the greatest height in this general category, and one can walk around in the burial pit with a bent back. The top is covered with two or three large slabs. Some

25 Hejebri 2002: 93.
26 Talai 2010: 133.
27 Muscarella 1974: 58.
28 Danti 2013: 277–311; Danti and Cifarelli 2015.
29 Crawford 1975: 27.
30 Lippert 1977.
31 Rezalou and Ayramlou 2017: 37.
32 Hesari and Aliyari 2012: 115.
33 Khalatbari 2013: 191.
34 Muscarella 1974: 37–38.
35 Muscarella 1974: 58.
36 Hejebri 2000: 77.
37 Danti 2013: 277–311; Danti and Cifarelli 2015.
38 Burney 1962: 146.
39 Naseri 2020: 333.
40 Khalatbari 2013: 191.
41 Rezalou 2007: 41.
42 Pourfaraj 2007: 301.
43 Pourfaraj 2012: 73.
44 Kazempour *et al*. 2012: 158.
45 Naseri 2020: 198; Hejebri 2017: 31.
46 Hesari and Aliyari 2012: 115.
47 Khalatbari 2004.
48 Seyidov 2003: 198.
49 Baxşəliyev *et al*. 2010: 115.
50 Naseri 2020: 329.
51 Naseri 2020: 329.
52 Bahşaliyev and Seyidov 1995.
53 Özfirat 2018: 152.
54 Konyar 2004: 627.

Figure 5. a-b) Rectangular grave at Boynu Yogun (Pourfaraj 2012: 73); c-d) Rectangular grave from the survey of Varzeqan (Naseri 2020: 329); e-f) Cists from the survey of Varzeqan (Naseri 2020: 329); g-h) Chamber graves from Zard Khaneh cemetery (Niknami and Kazempour 2011: 42). / *Pl. 5. a-b) Dikdörtgen Mezar, Boynu Yogun ; c-d) Dikdörtgen Mezar, Varzeqan araştırması; e-f) Taş mezarlar,Varzeqan araştırması; g-h) Oda mezarlar, Zard Khaneh mezarlığı.*

examples were built under the ground and provided with an entry. Respective graves have been reported from the Qaradagh region[55], Shahar Yeri[56], Zard Khaneh[57] (Fig. 5g-h) and the cemetery of Marian in the Talesh region[58]. They are found in eastern Anatolia in the Lake Van Basin[59], and in Doğubayazıt at the sites of Teperiz Kalesi[60] and Ernis-Evditepe[61].

CROMLECHS

Cromleches mark a highly distinct burial custom in northwest Iran in the 2nd and 1st millennia BC. Literally, the term divides itself into "Crom" meaning a ring or circle and "Lech" meaning stone. Hence, in its simplest application the term describes a stone circle circumscribing a central burial[62]. Apart from northwest Iran, circular arrangements of stone slabs around burials are attested in several other regions, from the Altai Mountains to all over Europe, Caucasia, and east Turkey. In effect, they are merely rectangular or pit burials that are further furnished by

[55] Hejebri 2017.
[56] Pourfaraj 2007: 301.
[57] Niknami and Kazempour 2011: 42.
[58] Khalatbari 2004: 51–54.
[59] Özfirat 2018: 152.
[60] Konyar 2004, 465.
[61] Konyar 2004: 483.
[62] Smith *et al*. 2009: 106.

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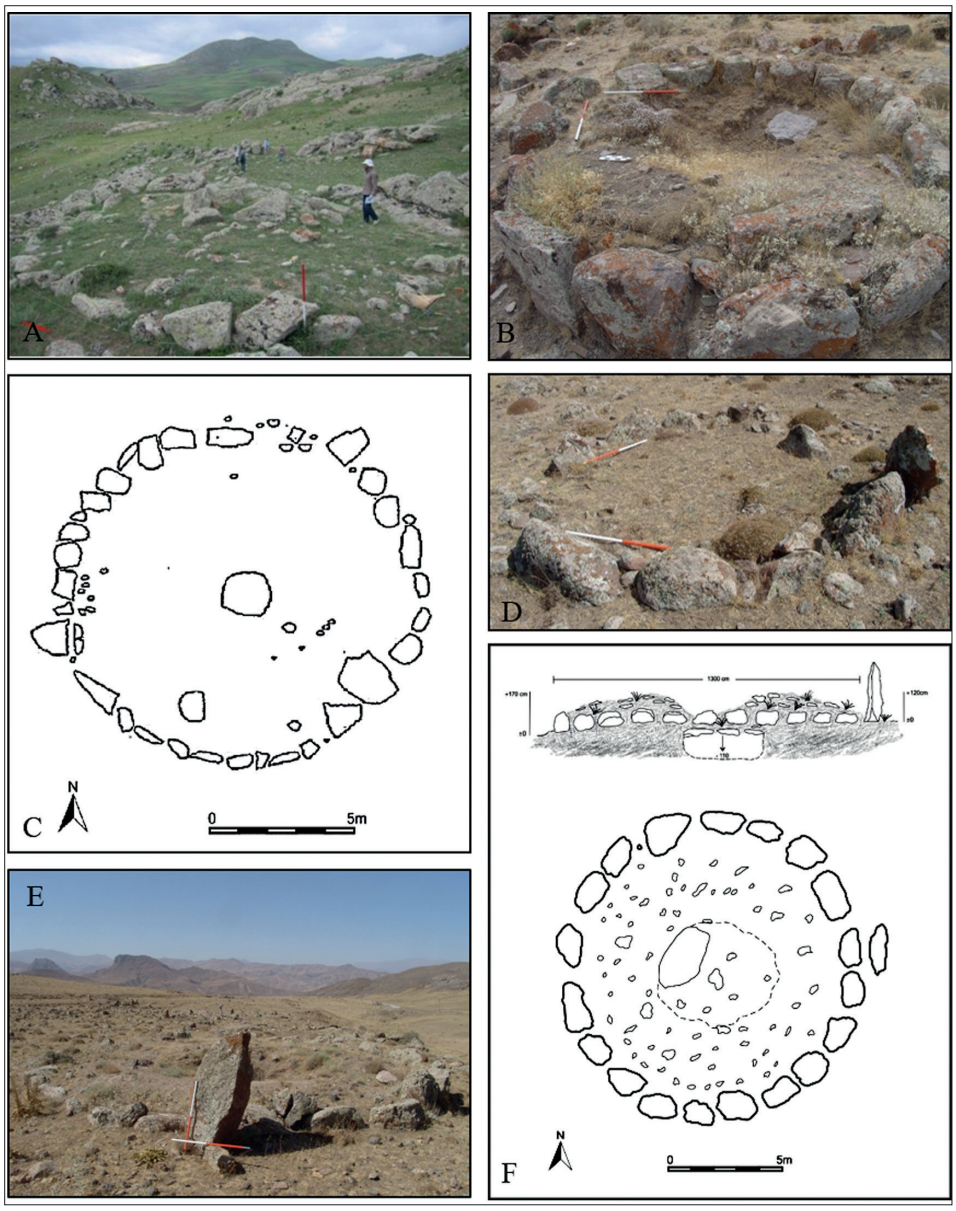

Figure 6. Cromlech at Zard Khaneh cemetery (Niknami and Kazempour 2011: 40); b-d) Cromlech from the survey of Varzeqan; e-f) Cromlech with a stela in Varzeqan (Naseri 2020: 330-331). / *Pl. 6. a) Cromlech, Zard Khaneh mezarlığı; b-d) Cromlech, Varzekan'ın araştırmasından, e,f) Varzekan'da dikili taşlı Cromlech.*

one or occasionally more circumscribing circles of varied diameter. In Iranian Azerbaijan the attested diameters range from 3 to 20–25 meters[63], while from other regions have been reported spans up to 95–100 meters, with a notably great example of about 95 meters coming from the Altai region[64]. Surveys and excavations in Caucasia have produced multiple sub-classes of the Cromlech tradition. Described under the labels Standard, Spiral, Mounded, Budding, Paved, Stepped, Cobble, and Bedrock[65], they reflect the high structural variability of this grave type. In northwest Iran also occur a number of the above sub-types, some flanked by stela ranging in height between 1 to 5 meters[66] (Fig. 6e-f).

In eastern and northern quarters of Iranian Azerbaijan, this mortuary tradition apparently thrived in the mid-Bronze through the Iron period. De Morgan was first to cite Cromleches from the region[67], and at present hundreds of burial grounds formed of these graves are known. The conspicuous instances lie at Shahar Yeri[68], Gilavan of Khalkhal[69], Qala Khosrow[70], Shisheh[71], Khoram Abad[72], Zard Khaneh[73] (Fig. 6a), Boynu Yogun[74], Qizil Qaya[75],

63 Hejebri 2017: 349.
64 Bourgeois & Gheyle 2005: 11.
65 Smith *et al*. 2009: 106–107.
66 Naseri 2020: 329.
67 De Morgan 1905: 123.
68 Pourfaraj 2007: 301.
69 Rezalou 2007a.
70 Rezalou 2007b; Rezalou and Ayramlou 2014a.
71 Bashash *et al*. 2001: 30.
72 Rezalou 2012: 82.
73 Niknami and Kazempour 2011: 40.
74 Pourfaraj 2012: 62.
75 Hajizadeh 2014: 159-180.

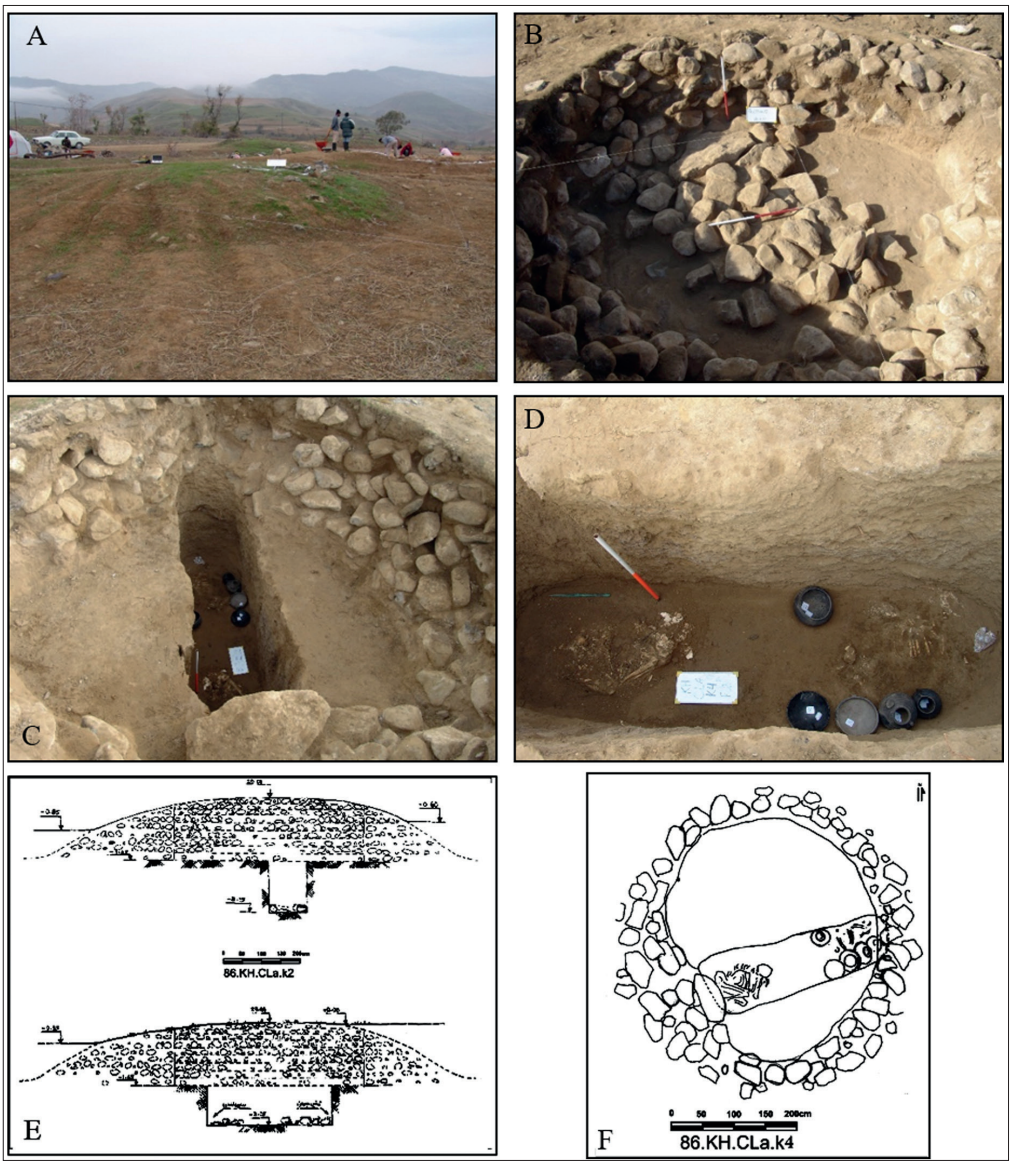

Figure 7. a-d) Different phases of the excavations of Kurgan No. 4 at Larijan, Khodafarin; e-f) plan and section of the kurgan (Hejebri 2007: 141–154). / *Pl.7. a-d) Kurgan kazılarının farklı aşamaları, No.4. Larijan, Khodafarin; e-f) Kurgan planı ve kesiti*

and Varzeqan[76] (Fig. 6b-d). The tradition is seen in the Caspian region at Tul-e Gilan, Asb Sara, Marian and Tendevin in the South Gorgan Rud Basin of the Talesh region[77].

In Caucasia, quite a few similar graves were identified by the Project ArAGATS in Armenia[78] and at sites like Gemi Qaya[79], Dübendi[80] and Nakhjir[81] in Azerbaijan. They further occur in east Anatolia[82] in the Ağri Dagh highlands and the Erzurum-Kars plateau[83], and at several cemeteries in the Doğubayazıt region[84] and Ernis-Evditepe[85].

KURGANS

Maria Gimbutas (1956) was first to introduce the term kurgan, denoting a burial mound, into the archaeological literature in 1956. Kurgans have been recorded over a vast region extending from the east to the Western Europe, Caucasia, east Anatolia, and central Asia[86]. They are mound-like heaps, and come in varying dimensions and heights depending on the importance

[76] Naseri 2020: 330-331.
[77] Khalatbari 2013: 112–128.
[78] Smith *et al*. 2009: 107.
[79] Baxşəliyev 2008: 127.
[80] Schachner 2011: 124.
[81] Seyidov and Baxseliyev 2002.
[82] Özfirat 2000: 31; Belli & Konyar 2003: 23.
[83] Özfirat 2018: 152.
[84] Konyar 2004: 432–445.
[85] Konyar 2004: 488.
[86] Gimbutas 1992: 401.

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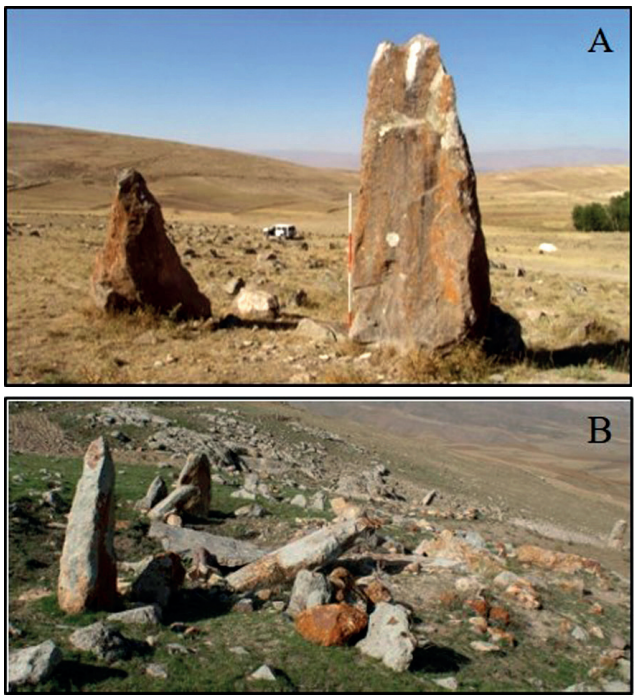

Figure 8. a) Stela exceeding 4 meters in height identified in the survey of Varzeqan (Naseri 2020: 333); b) Stela at Zard Khaneh (Niknami and Kazempour 2011: 38) / *Pl. 8. a) Varzeqan yüzey araştırmasında tespit edilen yüksekliği 4 metre boyundaki stel ; b) Stel, Zard Khaneh*

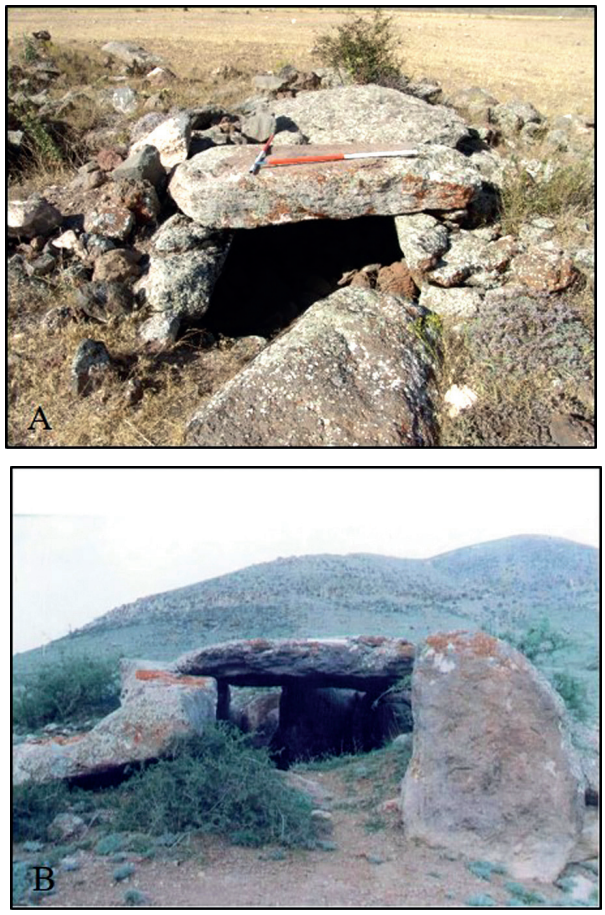

Figure 9. a) Dolmen from Varzeqan (Naseri 2020: 331); b) Dolmen from Ardabil (Hesari and Aliyari 2012: 122) / *Pl. 9. a) Dolmen, Varzeqan ; b) Dolmen, Ardabil.*

and social status of the buried. The construction process involved covering the burial pit with different material such as wood, different sized cobbles, stone slabs, flagstones, and clay to form a heap after interring the body. Beneath this heap lay a burial pit of rectangular; circle or oval form in different dimensions cut directly into the ground, and it would be refilled with soft soil once the funeral was completed after the body, goods and possible animal sacrifices were deposited therein. Some Kurgans also include a "Cromlech" or stone circle. The earliest Kurgan, dating to the Chalcolithic period (4th millennium BC), comes from Caucasia[87], but the burial form was more common in the 3rd-2nd millennium BC[88] and sustained at least as late as the Iron II.

Regarding the tradition in northwest Iran, O.W. Muscarella was first to excavate related graves at Se_Girdan (1969). He inadvertently termed them as tumuli, whist the designation in fact refers to more complicated burial mounds comprised of several distinct compartments such as a room, anteroom, forecourt, passage, and access way[89]. Later on, C. Burney identified 450 Kurgans of the 2nd and 1st millennium BC in Ardabil[90], were followed by the identifications and excavations of innumerable Kurgans by the Iranian archaeologists in northwest Iran, in Meshkinshahr-Igdir[91], Aslanduz[92], Larijan[93] (Fig. 6a-f), Jafarabad[94], and Khorramabad of Meshkinshahr[95].

Large numbers of Kurgans were recorded by the Project ArAGATS of Armenia[96] and several in the Republic of Azerbaijan at sites such as Khan Kandi of Qarabagh, Uch Tepe, Bersunlu, and Küdülü[97], Uzun Tepe, Telman Kend, Dübendi and seyidli[98]. In eastern Anatolia, the tradition flourished in the Ağri Dagh region and the Erzurum-Kars plateau[99], and the Bozkurt Kurgan[100] which is one of the famous excavated example.

DOLMENS

The term Dolmen refers to distinctive burial structures formed by a number of large upright stone slabs topped with a horizontally placed capstone. In virtue of their

87 Mongait 1977: 7; Museyibli 2008: 22.
88 Sagona 2004.
89 Roosevelt 2006: 71.
90 Ingraham and Summers 1979.
91 Hesari and Akbari 2005: 118–119.
92 Hesari and Aliyari 2012.
93 Hejebri 2007: 141–154.
94 Iravani 2010.
95 Rezalou 2014: 201.
96 Smith *et al*. 2009.
97 Baxşəliyev 2007: 79–96.
98 Schachner 2011: 127
99 Özfirat 2018: 152.
100 Özfirat 2009.

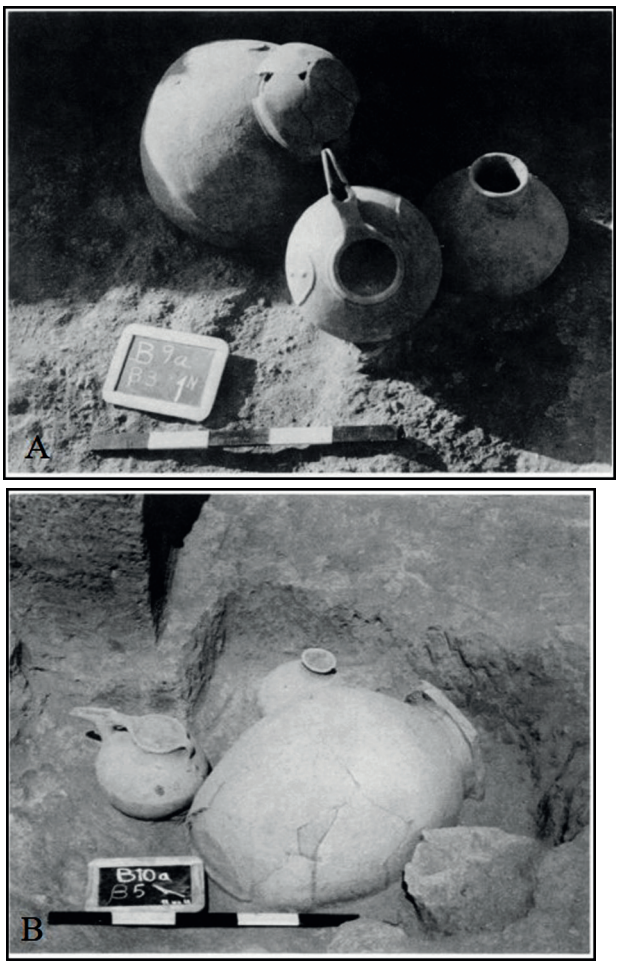

Figure 10. Pl. 10. a-b) Jar burial from Dinkha II (Muscarella 1974: 78). / *Pl. 10. a-b) Küp gömü, Dinkha II*

structure, they usually lie above the ground and are visible on the surface[101]. Large numbers of related burials have been found across a vast array of regions such as France, Africa, and Palestine[102], and this wide geographical distribution has given rise to different scholarly explanations, discussion of which is well beyond the scope of this study. Dolmens of Azerbaijan are mainly scattered in the eastern and northern highlands in the Qaradagh and Sabalan regions. Examples have been reported from the cemeteries of Zard Khaneh[103] and Shahar Yeri[104], and from the regional surveys of Ardabil[105] (Fig. 9b) and Qaradagh-Varzeqan[106] (Fig. 9a). Related burials occur similarly in regions further east, from Namin to Talesh and Astara in the southern Caspian littoral at such sites of Aq Evlar, Chelleh Khaneh, Hasan Zamini, Asb Sara, Tendevin and Tul[107]. Numerous Dolmens were identified in Anatolia span in date the Bronze to Iron periods[108].

[101] Shaw 1999: 542.
[102] Camps 1990: 321.
[103] Kazempour *et al*. 2012: 159.
[104] Pourfaraj 2007: 301.
[105] Hesari and Aliyari 2012: 122.
[106] Naseri 2020: 331.
[107] Khalatbari 2013: 115–116.
[108] Yükmen 2003.

JAR BURIALS

In northwest Iran burial in pottery jars is extremely scarce and the limited known examples merely belong to Dinkha. Dating to the Iron II, Dinkha II produced a total of 68 burials, of which 19 were from this burial type. The involved jars were mainly "buff matte storage vessels or large cooking pots," either with closed or open mouths. In most cases, the opening was sealed by large pottery fragments. They generally lay on their sides, but vertical and upside down positions also occurred. The excavator has assigned the skeletons mainly to infants, though in one case a tooth of an adult was within the burial jar[109] (Fig. 10a-b).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The extant ancient burials provide invaluable information. Wide distribution and large number of the cemeteries in northwest Iran and neighboring Caucasia and East Anatolia in the later 2nd and earlier 1st millennium BC has made the period particularly significant, rendering the Age of Cemeteries an apt moniker. Excavations have brought to light a wide array of commonalities and discords in the location of the regional cemeteries (detached or associated with a settlement) and the structure, construction materials and artifactual contents of their graves. In virtue of the presence of such grave goods as ceramic vessels and various types of weapons, the relevant cemeteries display a close correspondence in burial philosophy. Indeed, regional variances are witnessed when it comes to details, with the notable example being the location patterns of the cemeteries. In this respect, in Iranian Azerbaijan we find three groups of cemeteries. The first concerns those associated with settlements on the plains, with famous examples being the cemeteries of Hasanlu V and IV, Kordlar, Haftavan, and Dinkha. The second group is the burial grounds adjacent to forts and large and small fortified places, which are mainly located in the mountainous areas of east and north. It is represented by the cemeteries recorded at Zard Khaneh, Shahar Yeri, Qala Khosrow, and Seqendel (Sığındıl). The last group represents detached cemeteries, where the potential occupational remains derive simply from transient nomadic presences as is the case, for example, at those of Geoy Tepe A and B, Yanik Tepe, Göy Masjid, Larijan, and Jafarabad.

Mortuary practices, body treatment as well as funeral ceremony and sacrifice offering comprise major aspects of the religious life; a set of rules that lead the living to have their dead enter the future world in a certain manner. In particular, some populations

[109] Muscarella 1974: 58.

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practiced intramural burial as they believed that the dead's soul had a share in the food and other family rituals, and that they continued their normal lives in the afterworld.

One of the major aspects of the burial traditions in Iranian Azerbaijan in the late Bronze-Iron age is the formal diversity and structural heterogeneity of the graves. Most of the contemporary cemeteries contain graves of various types. In many cases, the earlier tradition of simple pit burial persisted side by side with the newly arrived regular structures that fall in different groups such as rectangular, semi-rectangular, cromlech, dolmen, and jar burials. The exact reasons behind this structural and formal multiplicity remain unclear. What is clear however is that geography played a direct role in burial practices. As an instance, in the low Lake Urmia basin cromleches, Dolmens, and Kurgans are rather rare or utterly absent, while they occur in higher frequencies in the east and north uplands in the mountains of Sabalan, Qaradagh, Qoshadagh, and Bozgoush (with the Kurgans in Se Girdan being an exception). Conversely, semi-rectangular burials and application of brick as construction material is unreported from the highlands but are common in the Lake Urmia region. And, whereas in the highlands the graves are mainly found to be of megalithic type, those in the low plains are in the main made of bricks and smaller stones.

With the absence of written and other essential evidence on the contemporary ethnicities and religious orientations, it is impossible to propose a reliable correlate between the diversified burial practices evidenced in the period in question with ethnic and religious diversities. The belief that different societies share about life after death is certainly a main reason for depositing grave artifacts with the dead. The conviction supposedly thrived all over Iranian Azerbaijan, Caucasia, and east Anatolia. Heterogeneous belief systems, social, economic and political statuses, and ethnicities could have been among the determining factors prompting the construction of varied grave types. Yet, it is unknown to us which factors defined these incongruities as well as their scope as we lack conclusive evidence.

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