

IN THE LIGHT OF NEW EVIDENCE FROM THE ERZURUM PLAIN: AN OVERVIEW OF KURA-ARAXES FUNERARY PRACTICES IN EASTERN ANATOLIA

ERZURUM OVASI'NDAN YENİ KANITLAR IŞIĞINDA DOĞU ANADOLU'DAKİ KURA-ARAS ÖLÜ GÖMME UYGULAMALARINA GENEL BİR BAKIŞ

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ABSTRACT

The Early Bronze Age of the Eastern Anatolian Highlands, North-western Iran and Southern Caucasus has been characterized by the Kura-Araxes cultural complex, which has major significance by way of its chronology and geography. The main problem that we have is insufficient knowledge of its funerary practices, and the principal reason for this problem is a lack of excavations on necropolis sites, or on sites with burials. According to a recent study the total number of excavated sites with burials in the Southern Caucasus numbers just 111. The picture is even darker for the Eastern Anatolian Highlands. There has been no excavated graveyard in the highland up until now. Only discrete burials have been found in the region at limited excavated Kura-Araxes sites, and so far they have failed to present a burial tradition, or typology of graves, for the Kura-Araxes culture of Eastern Anatolia. Recent rescue excavation works, within the scope of the TANAP project, have been undertaken between 2016 and 2017 at

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Alaybeyi Höyük on the Erzurum Plain. A small group of Kura-Araxes graves has been found during this excavation project. The main aim of this paper is to present a general evaluation on the funerary practices of the Kura-Araxes culture in Eastern Anatolia, in the light of both older evidence, and more newly-discovered evidence.

ÖZET

Kuzeybatı İnan ve Güney Kafkasya ile birlikte Doęu Anadolu genelini Erken Tunç Çaę'da karakterize eden en önemli kültürel yapı; "Kura-Aras Kültürü"dür. Bu büyük, çok bileşenli kültürel yapının bünyesinde, çok sayıda özellięin yanı sıra sorunlar da bulunmaktadır. Bu özellik ve sorunlardan biri de kültürün ölü gömme gelenekleri ile ilgilidir. Bu konunun sorun olarak ortaya çıkmasında temel ayırım, nekropol kazılarının azlığıdır. Son dönemde yapılan arařtırmalara göre, tüm Güney Kafkasya'da, kazılan alanlar içerisinde mezarlık içeren birim sayısı sadece 111 dir. Konumuz olan Doęu Anadolu Bölgesi'nde ise hiç bir nekropol alanı kazılmamıştır. Bu yörede kazılan mezarlar münferit mezarlar olup, yerleşim içi gömü nitelięi göstermektedirler. Bu mezarlara göre kültüre dair bir gömü geleneęi ve mezarlık tipolojisi ortaya konmuş olsa da bunlar yeterli olmaktan uzaktır. 2016 ve 2017 yıllarında Erzurum Ovası'ndaki Alaybeyi Höyük'te TANAP (Trans – Anadolu Doęal Gaz Boru Hattı) Projesi kapsamında yapılan kurtarma kazılarında, bir grup Kura-Aras mezarı tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışma hem eldeki verileri dikkate alarak Güney Kafkasya ve Doęu Anadolu'daki Kura-Aras gömü uygulamalarına dair genel bir deęerlendirme hem de Alaybeyi mezarlarını kapsamlı olarak bilim dünyasına sunma amacındadır.

INTRODUCTION

The Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex, with its many components, was an indicator of the Early Bronze Age in the northern terrain of the Ancient Near East, spreading across an enormous area from beyond the Caucasus Mountain range to the lowlands of the Levant, and from the coast of the Caspian Sea to the Central Anatolian Plateau (Fig. 1). This cultural phenomenon continued its existence in this vast expanse, with regional variations, for more than one thousand years. Because of its geographical and chronological immensity this cultural complex has presented us with several unresolved problems which vary from its ceramics to its sequence of events. Its graves and burial customs present one of these problems, and this particular problem applies further into Eastern Anatolia, which is one of the culture's prominent expansion regions. In the Southern Caucasus we can see a clearer picture about this matter¹; regrettably, despite its expanse and its influence, this region is not fortunate with respect to archaeological excavations and projects.

some excavated sites, there are no necropolis/graveyards among those sites which have been excavated. Also, during surveys which have been carried out region-wide, a very limited number of graves belonging to the Kura-Araxes Culture have been found. On the other hand, there are striking finds in regional museums which may have been obtained from graves via illegal excavations. Recently some good news has come from the Erzurum Plain. In 2016 and 2017 a small group of graves dating to the Kura-Araxes period was found within the concepts of the TANAP (*Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project*) rescue excavation project at Alaybeyi Höyük on the Erzurum Plain. These graves presented significant results concerning burial traditions of the Kura-Araxes cultural phenomenon in Eastern Anatolia.

As shown here, the available evidence concerning this subject is scanty and problematic, whereas in the Southern Caucasus, which is the adjacent region, a considerable number of graveyards dating to this cultural complex have been excavated (Figs.1-2). The main aim

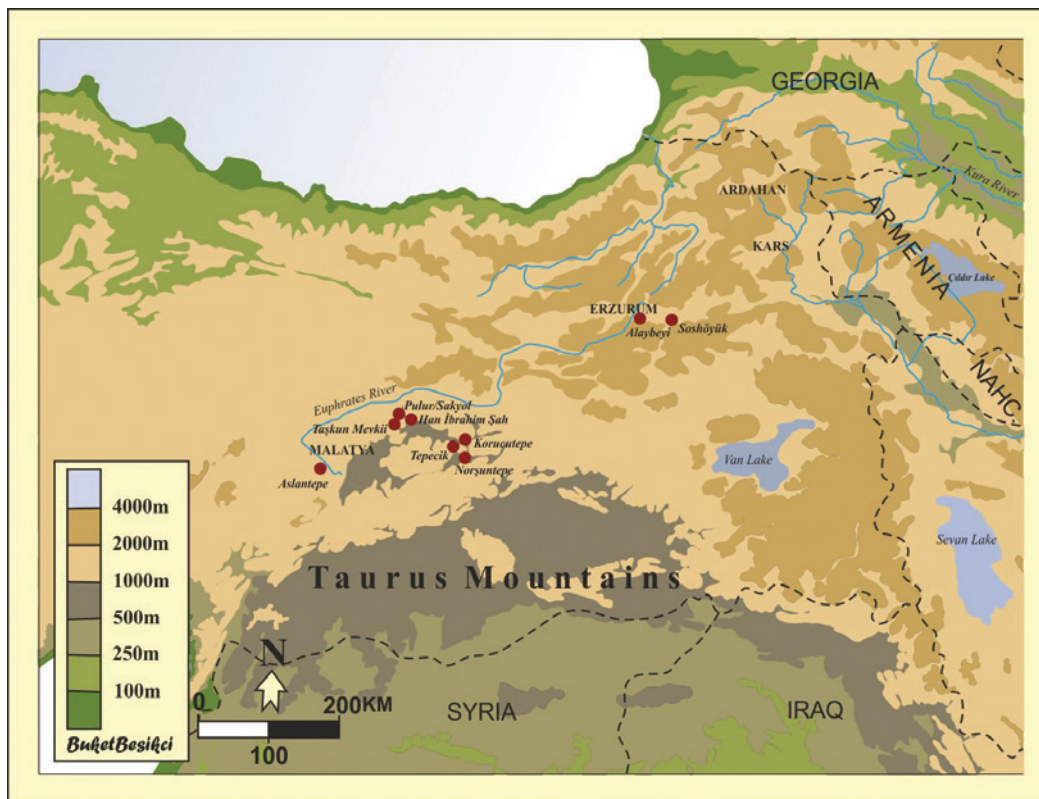


Figure 1: Map Showing the Sites Mentioned in the Text /Metin İçerisindeki Yerleşimleri Gösteren Harita

Although, historically, archaeological investigations have been undertaken for more than one hundred years in the region, unfortunately the number of systematic excavations can be counted on the fingers of two hands. Although single graves have been found sporadically at

of this study is to present and evaluate the new graves on the Erzurum Plain and to make observations and suggestions concerning this problem, by considering the limited available evidence and results of investigations from adjacent regions.

¹ Poulmarc'h 2014: 231-232.

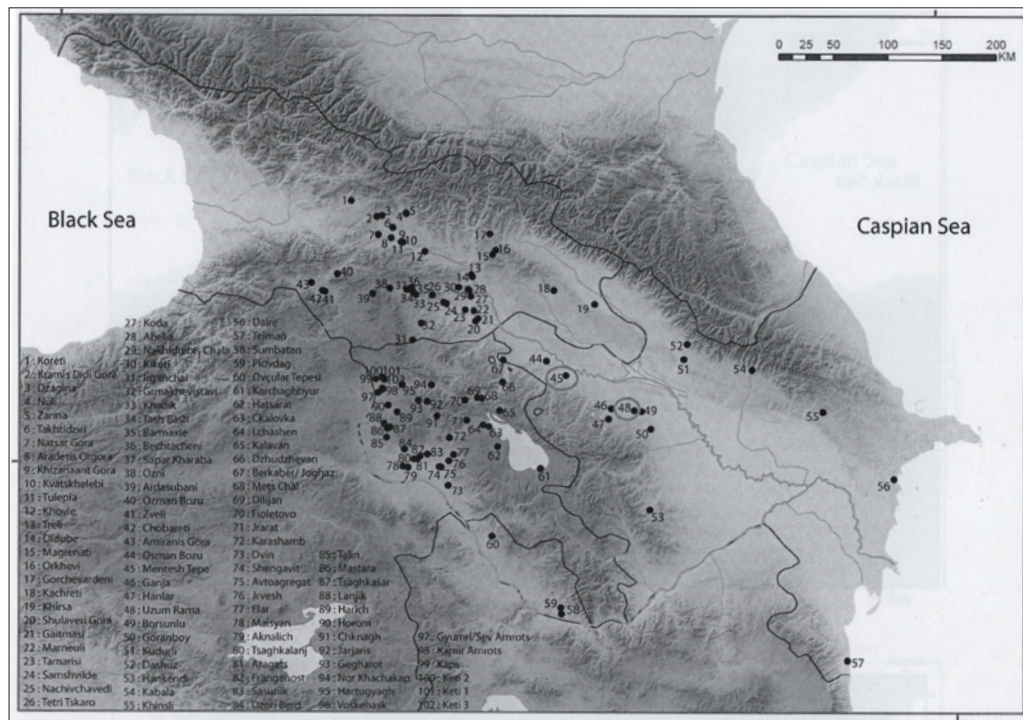


Figure 2: The Kura-Araxes Burials in Southern Caucasus / Güney Kafkasya'daki Kura-Aras Gömüleri (Paoulmarc'h 2014, Fig.2)

AN OVERVIEW OF KURA-ARAXES FUNERARY PRACTICES

Burial practice is one of the least known subjects of the Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex. The evidence concerning this subject is scattered and mainly comes from excavated sites in the Southern Caucasus between 1940 and 2000. According to a current study, a total of 111 sites with burials was inventoried over the whole Southern Caucasus. However according to many scholars we should be prudent when looking at this evidence because of its stratigraphy. In this recent study the tomb typology and regional distribution has been revealed. Accordingly there are six different tomb types in Kura-Araxes funeral practices in Southern Caucasus: pit tomb, variable shape tomb, cist grave, kurgan, heaped stone tomb and horseshoe shaped tomb² (Fig. 3).

Surprisingly, up until today, there has been no excavated cemetery discovered in Eastern Anatolia dating to the Kura-Araxes Cultural process. Only a few discrete graves containing mostly child and baby burials have been found in buildings within settlements. It is the stratigraphy which proves to be the most problematic; however, as can be seen, the evidence coming from Southern Caucasus is of primary importance in understanding the burial practices of this cultural phenomenon. Therefore we should examine this evidence carefully (Fig. 4)

The four graves which have been found at the Grmakhevista site in the Dmanisi province of Georgia are some of the earliest samples of Kura-Araxes graves, but unfortunately these early graves have not been published, with the only report being that Kura-Araxes pots have been found in these graves. The other earliest samples of graves of the culture are at a site at Trelı, where a few pit burials have produced Kura-Araxes materials³.

One of the key sites for our subject must surely be Amiranis-Gora, located on the borderland between Turkey and Georgia, where a total of 60 graves were found and excavated by T. N. Chunishvili in the 1960's. These graves are mostly stone-cist, stone-lined and horseshoe-shaped earthen graves. According to the excavator two horseshoe-shaped graves placed at Horizon I should be dated earlier than the other graves. As well as these graves, pit burials containing baby skeletons have also been found under the "long house" buildings at Amiranis-Gora. Chubinishvili suggested, when considering these pit burials, that these buildings may have been used for cultic purposes. The graves of Amiranis Gora housed individual and collective burials, and the funerary goods which have been found in these graves include pots, bone and stone tools⁴. (Fig.4)

In terms of funeral practices of the Kura-Araxes Culture, the other important site in Georgia is

² Paoulmarc'h 2014: 232-244, Fig.2.

³ Kuşnareva/Çubinişvili 1970: 61-68

⁴ Kuşnareva/Çubinişvili 1970: 61-68

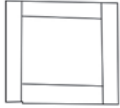
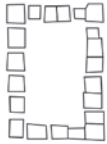
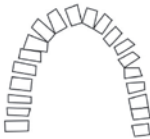

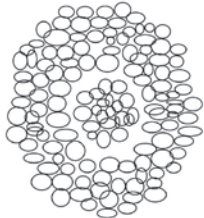
	Definitions	Illustrations
Cist	Tombs in which the walls and roof are constructed of stones. The slabs forming the walls are laid out on the short side and number 4 to 8. (Aurenche 1977).	
Tombs of variable shape	Tombs with walls consisting of one or two rows of stones for which the plan is rectangular, square, oblong or circular. The stones are very rarely joined with mortar.	
Horseshoe shaped tombs	Constructed tombs with walls consisting of one or two rows of stones for which the plan is rectangular, square, oblong or circular. The stones are very rarely joined with mortar.	
Heaps of stones	Concentrations of pebbles/stone on the ground that indicate the presence of a burial beneath. They are circular in shape and between 1 and 5 m in diameter. These heaps of stones are usually found above pit tombs but they can also be placed above tombs or variable shape.	
KURGAN	Cover of pebbles forming a circle of which the minimum diameter is 5 m. A funerary chamber is not always present and maybe be dug or not.	

Figure 3: The Typology of Kura-Araxes Tombs / *Kura-Aras Mezarlarının Tipolojisi* (Poulmarc'h 2014, Fig.1)

Kvatskhelebi in Sida Kartli province. Fifteen stone-lined earthen graves have been discovered during excavation at this site, and generally they are collective burials. The funerary goods of the graves in Kvatshelebi were mostly ceramics, and, rarely, metal objects. In particular, Grave Number 2 draws attention from the point of view of its grave goods. The grave held a female skeleton and comparatively wealthy grave goods comprising a copper diadem, band and

beads, silver pins, pendants, crystal and stone beads, necklaces, and bracelets, all reminding us of the royal tomb at Arslantepe. Metal weapons such as copper knives, daggers and stone arrowheads have also been found in these graves as funerary goods. According to the excavator, Graves Number 2 and 6 attract attention because of their grave goods, and may have belonged to the same family or lineage that had social status⁵.

⁵ Kuşnareva/Çubinişvili 1970: 67, d.n.6.

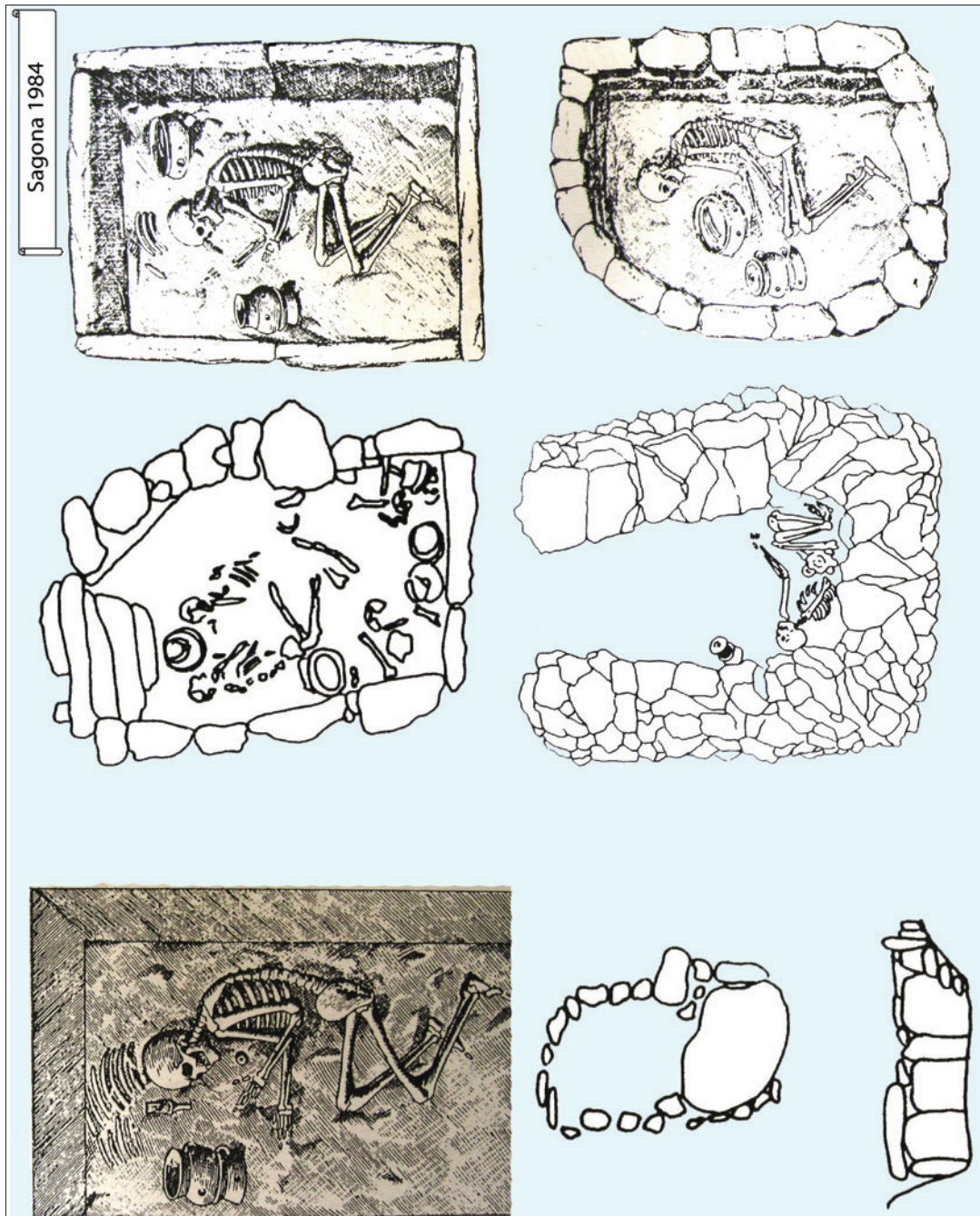


Figure 4: The Kura-Araxes Tombs from Southern Caucasus / *Güney Kafkasya'dan Kura-Aras Mezar Örnekleri* (Işıklı 2011: Res.25)

During the excavation carried out by B. A. Kuftin and his team at Kiketi on the Kvemo-Kartli plain, fourteen graves and pits have been revealed. According to Kuftin this site was used as a cemetery area during the EBA II and III. These Kiketi graves are mostly simple earthen, cist-stone and horseshoe-shaped graves, most of which contain collective burials. In particular, Grave Number 7, which is horseshoe-shaped, attracts attention in this respect. Apart from Kura-Araxian pottery, funerary goods in these graves include limestone beads, bone spindle whorls, rings, copper objects (bracelets) and flintstone tools⁶.

⁶ Sagona 1984: 47, Plate XII:7; Fig. 131:1

The excavations at Samshvilde carried out by G. I. Mirtskhuava between 1960 and 1970 presented a total of 38 graves. They are mostly rectangular stone-lined earthen graves, with only two graves which are circular. Surprisingly no complete skeletons have been found in any graves at Samshvilde, and at the time the excavator suggested that the skeletons or bodies might have been disarticulated before being placed in the graves. The funerary goods mostly consisted of pottery, with a few metal objects, usually copper, such as rings, pins with spiral heads, ornaments and beads also found⁷.

⁷ Sagona 1984: 43-44; Fig. 130; 131:2.

In relation to our subject the other important sites in Georgia are Koda, Tetriskaro, Ozni, Kiketi, Kulbakebi, Tamarisi, Ardisubani, Raçisubani, Khizinaant–Gora and Didube; however it is unfortunate that most of the graves at these sites have not been published formally. According to excavation reports the graves are mostly earthen, cist-stone and horseshoe-shaped. For example at Koda, in Kvemo-Kartli province, 30 cist-stone, stone-lined and earthen graves have been excavated which include mainly collective burials, with most skeletons in a half-bent position. In Khizinaant-Gora 9 earthen graves have been discovered outside of the settlement, but they have not been published. During the excavations at Ozni carried out by Kuftin between 1947 and 1948 four earthen, stone-lined graves were found, and they housed adult skeletons in a half-bent position. Grave goods including pots, copper and bronze bracelets and stone beads were found with them⁸.

Finally, in relation to evidence from Georgia, two earthen graves at Gaitmazi, a few earthen, stone lined graves at Zveli, and an earthen, stone-lined grave at Sioni should be mentioned. Funerary goods of pins with spiral heads, rings and folded wire tubes have been found in the graves at Gaitmazi⁹.

We should mention E. Rova's recent study on Burial Customs in the Shida Kartli Region in Georgia. Rova has been focused on burial customs between Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Ages in that region, and according to this study there are 90 published graves in this region¹⁰. She reached similar results after the analysis of the graves¹¹: "...Graves were usually located in "extra-moenia" cemeteries situated in close proximity to the contemporary settlements, remarkable homogeneity in burial customs, preference for individual pit graves, scarce differentiation of burial goods, different treatment of newborn and young children. Kurgans (or kurgan-like burials) are attested in Shida Kartli during the KA period, but – contrary to other regional variants of the KA culture – they are very rare there..."

The Kura-Araxian sites in Armenia are also informative about the funerary practices of the culture. Among these sites Elar is one of the most important. Twenty-one graves have been discovered at this site which was excavated by Bayburtyan and Khanzadyan. There are two types of graves at Elar: (a) horseshoe-shaped and (b) stone-lined earthen graves. According to the excavators the horseshoe-shaped graves might have been earlier than the others¹² (Fig.4).

⁸ Sagona 1984: 48-52.

⁹ Sagona 1984: 52, Plate XVII: 4 – 7.

¹⁰ For inventory of the graves, see Rova (publishing), 3

¹¹ Rova (publishing): 10-11.

¹² Sagona 1984: 55-56, Fig. 135.1: 135.2.

The other important site in Armenia is Ketik on the Shirak Plain. The graves which have been found here are cist-stone graves which have a small corridor or entrance on the southern side, recalling the dramas in kurgans. Similar graves have been found at Horom and Dzoriberd as well. The graves at Ketik consist of individual or collective burials, with mostly pottery found as grave goods.

During excavations at Horom in 1992, a cist-stone grave including a collective burial (three people) has been found. In this grave three Kura-Araxian pots and two stone anthropomorphic figurines were discovered at the entrance.

Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan are significant expansion areas of the Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex; there are four important Kura-Araxian graveyards which have been reported in Nakhchivan: Diza, Garabulag, Khornu and Plovdağ. Thirty-three cist-stone, earthen and barrow graves, housing individual and collective burials, have been excavated at Plovdağ. The skeletons were discovered in half-bent positions in the graves, and funerary goods consisting mostly of pottery and a few metal objects were found with them.

The secondary grave type of the Kura-Araxes Culture is kurgans, although they were not as common during the Kura-Araxes Cultural process as they were in the Middle Bronze Ages. Kurgans and their burial customs were first seen at the end of IVth millennium and beginning of IIIrd millennium B.C., and were more prevalent on the northern side of the Caucasus Range. The earlier kurgans consisted of a cist-stone grave in the middle of a mound of stones and earth. Some kurgans had megalithic structures in the centre of tumuli. The kurgans known to have been used in the Kura-Araxes Cultural period are seen at Novosvobodnaya'da and Satchkere in the Northern Caucasus. According to some scholars Trialeti kurgans, which are the most well-known, might have been used during the EBA – in other words, in the Kura-Araxes period. In Georgia, the other kurgans which date to the Kura-Araxes period are at Şulaveris Gora Stepanakert, Sachkhere, Uç tepe and Tkviani. Funerary gifts of Kura-Araxian pottery were found in these kurgans as well as some metal; however the kurgans dating from the Kura-Araxes period were never as rich in metal objects as kurgans which dated to the Middle Bronze Ages.

In Azerbaijan five kurgans at Osman Bozu, presenting Kura-Araxian pots as funerary goods, were found to contain collective burials, some of which are cremations. Because of this feature the Osman Bozu kurgan is unique.

In conclusion: when considering the evidence coming from South Caucasus, we reach the outcomes below:

There are two main grave types in the Kura-Araxes Culture: The first is earthen graves employing different shapes and techniques, of which cist-stone is the most wide-spread sub-type of this group. The second is kurgans. In a recent study by M. Paulmarc'h five different grave types in Kura-Araxes Culture in Southern Caucasus have been reported: cist tombs, tombs of variable shape, pit tombs, horseshoe shaped tombs, heaps of stone and kurgans¹³ (Fig.3).

The Kura-Araxian graves generally have been placed out of settlement. (Kiketi, Keti and Kota.) Also graves at some sites have been placed within the settlement (Kvatskhelebi and Elar.). In the Southern Caucasus the most widespread grave types are earthen graves, cist-stone graves and horseshoe-shaped graves although the horseshoe-shaped graves are few in number. Generally they contained collective burials. According to scholars this type of grave might have belonged to the same family or line. The basic earthen (pit) graves have been in use since the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods in the Southern Caucasus. Cist-stone graves were a new innovation which occurred in the Early Bronze Age along with the Kura-Araxes Culture. These graves have been prevalent in specific regions of Georgia, such as Kvemo-Kartli province and Armenia. The burials in Kura-Araxian graves are generally inhumation burials. Cremation burials are very few. It's not easy to put the Kura-Araxian grave types into chronological order. All grave types can be seen together in one settlement at the same period. The dating of the Kura-Araxian graves is also problematic. As said above the stratigraphic positions of most graves in the Southern Caucasus are under debate. We only have an absolute date (radiocarbon dating) coming from the cist-grave at Horom in Armenia. The Kura-Araxian graves might contain individual or collective burials, with the number of collective burials varying between four and eleven people. These collective burials can give us some clue about the socio-political organisation of the Kura-Araxian folk, with societies probably comprising large families and family lines. The Kura-Araxian graves presented with richer and more complex funerary gifts than the basic earthen graves of the early agriculturalist communities of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods when funerary gifts were generally standard and few in quantity and diversity. The main grave goods are: pottery; mostly copper and bronze metal objects like diadems, bracelets, necklaces, belts, pins, beads, swords, knives, arrowheads; stone objects like limestone and semi-precious stone beads; obsidian and flintstone tools and arrowheads; bone tools; and clay and stone spindlewhorls. When considering the evidence related to funerary practices and graves, it is difficult to say anything about social hierarchy and differences concerning Kura-Araxian communities.

¹³ Poulmarc'h 2014: 232-233, Fig. 1-2

AN OVERVIEW OF KURA-ARAXES FUNERARY PRACTICES IN EASTERN ANATOLIA: KEY SITES, EVIDENCE AND PROBLEMS

As for Eastern Anatolia, we know that this vast and harsh region is the main expansion area of the Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex; unfortunately, however, our knowledge about funerary practices of this cultural complex in Eastern Anatolia is extremely limited. The main reason for this situation is that, up until today, no graveyards belonging to the Kura-Araxes Culture have been excavated. The scant knowledge we have comes from a few individual burials at Kura-Araxian sites excavated in the region. These burials are mostly placed within settlements and contained child or baby burials. Now, before focusing on this limited evidence, we should look at the funerary practices of the period prior to the Kura-Araxes Cultural period, in other words, the Late Chalcolithic period. It is useful to understand the developing process in this matter (Fig.5).

As is known, in Anatolian and Eastern Anatolian regional chronology, the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I periods are accepted as the one cultural period. This transition period contained highly important cultural transformations and alterations, and is accepted as the period of the formation of the Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex in Eastern Anatolia and its adjacent regions. The key sites of this founding process in Eastern Anatolia are Sos Höyük in Erzurum¹⁴, Arslantepe in Malatya¹⁵, Tepecik¹⁶, Norşuntepe¹⁷ and Korucutepe¹⁸ in Elazığ. Unfortunately the related layers of these sites which presented the earliest Kura-Araxian materials have not given any evidence about funerary practices of this culture (Fig.5).

The striking evidence for Late Chalcolithic burial practices in Eastern Anatolia comes from Korucutepe in Elazığ province. The two rectangular-shaped graves made of mud-brick were discovered at Level B dating to the late Chalcolithic period of Korucutepe, and belonged to two adults, one male and one female. Korucutepe graves have very rich funerary gifts. In the grave of the woman, a silver diadem, a crescent-shaped necklace, a silver wrist supporter decorated with a wild goat motif, pins and rings for hair, a lot of limestone, bone and carnelian beads and seals have been found as funerary goods. In the grave of the man, pottery, a mace head, silver wrist supporter, and a copper dagger have been

¹⁴ Sagona 2010: 42-43.

¹⁵ Frangipane 1998: 292.

¹⁶ Yalçın 2012: 47.

¹⁷ Hauptmann 2000: 420-421.

¹⁸ Nocera 2000: 76.

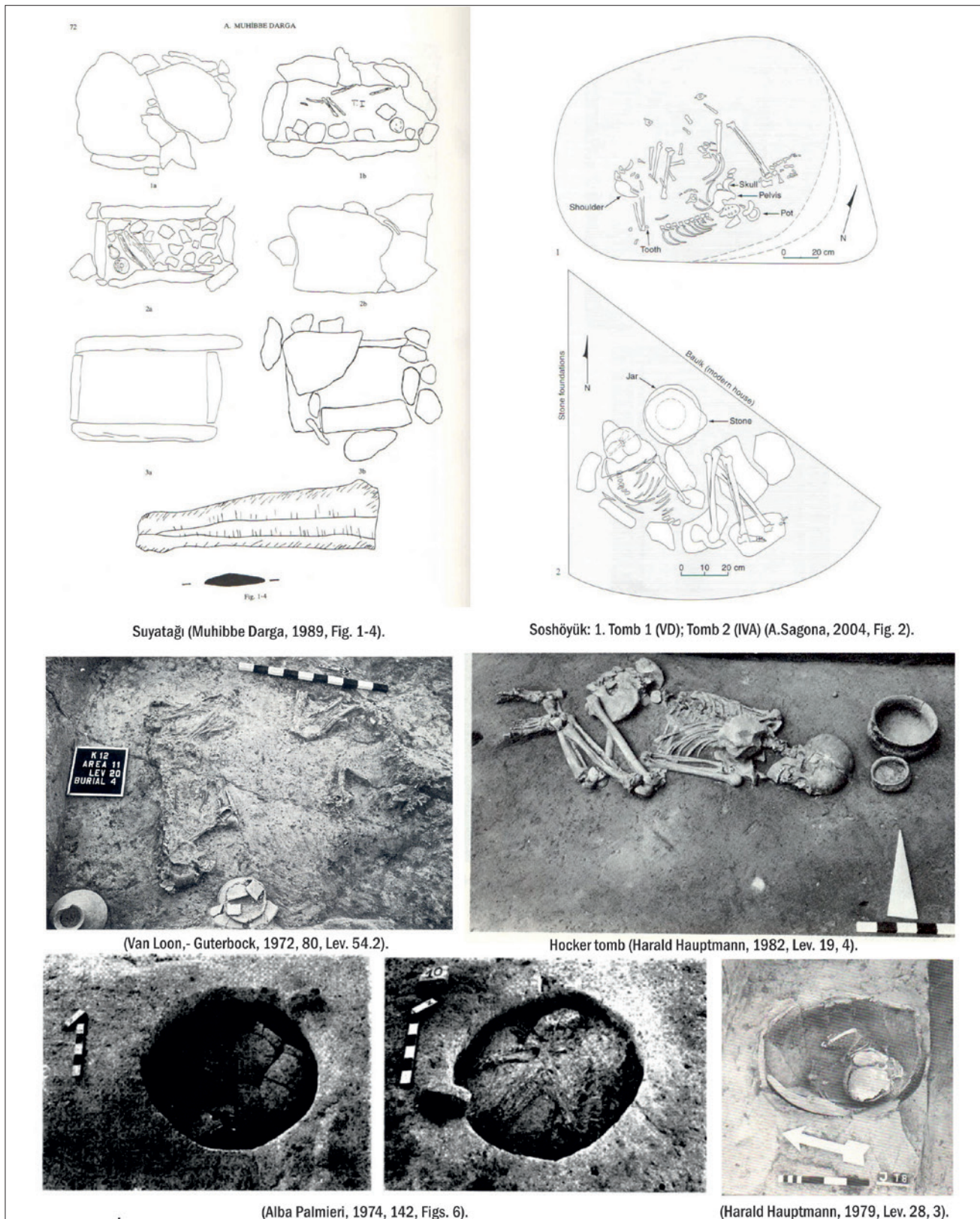


Figure 5: Kura-Araxes Burials in Eastern Anatolia / *Doğu Anadolu'daki Kura-Aras Mezar Örnekleri*

found. According to the excavators these two graves probably belonged to elites living in Korucutepe (Fig.5)¹⁹.

In level 7 and 8 of Norşuntepe, another important Chalcolithic site of the Elazığ region, a few burials placed under floors of houses have been found. They are mostly basic earthen pit graves containing young and children

¹⁹ Van Loon/Guterbock 1972: 80, 54, 2.

burials (Fig. 2)²⁰. In Arslantepe, a key site of Eastern Anatolia prehistory, very few burials dating to the Late Chalcolithic period have been found and those we have are similar to Norşuntepe samples (Fig. 3)²¹. At Tepecik, some traces of mud-brick graves have been found in a building dating to the Late Uruk period (Fig.5)²².

Undoubtedly the most striking find concerning burial practices of the Kura-Araxes Culture in Eastern Anatolia is the “royal tomb” at Arslantepe in Malatya. At the same time, this burial context is a good sample because of its stratigraphic position, and thus it is also known as the earliest Kura-Araxian burial to be found in Eastern Anatolia. Although this burial context presented very vital results concerning the development process of the Kura-Araxes Culture and its interrelationship among cultural regions, it cannot reflect the general burial customs of the region because of it being a unique sample. However, for the time being, this tomb is known as the most special, and the earliest, Kura-Araxian grave in Eastern Anatolia²³ (Fig.6).

The royal tomb, which has been the subject of much research, is located inside the ruins of monumental public buildings at Arslantepe VIA²⁴. It is a cist-stone grave stratigraphically placed at Arslantepe VIB1, dating to the end of the IVth millennium and beginning of IIIrd millennium B.C. The shape of the grave is rectangular with rounded corners, and its surface was covered with large flat slabs²⁵. On the slabs the skeletons of four youths aged between 12 and 18 have been found. M. Frangipane, the excavator of Arslantepe, considered their positions and interpreted them as sacrificial. The practice of human sacrifice is extremely unusual for the Kura-Araxian burial practices. Grave goods found beside the young skeletons included seven early Kura-Araxian pots, two silver-copper alloy diadems, and hair pins with spiral heads (Fig.6)²⁶.

In a cist-stone grave an adult male skeleton in a contracted position has been discovered, along with rich grave gifts. These rich funerary gifts consist of seventy-five metal objects and many pots and beads. The inventory of the metal objects groups is: twenty-five copper objects (nine spear heads, two swords, two daggers, four axes, two cutting blades, two chisels, one knife and two vases), seven silver objects (two pins, one hair pin and three beads); twenty-eight copper-silver alloy objects (one

dagger, seven spirals, fifteen amulets, four rings, one belt) and four golden objects (three beads, one spiral for hair)²⁷ (Fig.6).

The pots are probably connected to the presentation of food and drink. According to Frangipane, the arrangement of the pottery within the grave should have a “symbolic meaning”. Frangipane also suggested that this extraordinary burial context might have belonged to an elite figure who may have been a leader or a chief of pastoral groups living on the Malatya Plain or adjacent regions²⁸.

As said before, the royal tomb of Arslantepe is a unique sample in terms of its burial customs and funerary gifts, and for this reason it is not easy finding its parallel in Eastern Anatolia. Actually the cist-stone grave type containing rich funerary gifts has been seen in Eastern Anatolia, and particularly the Euphrates Valley, during the Early Bronze Age; however the royal tomb is the earliest and most interesting sample of them all. According to Palumbi, the most comparable royal tomb is the Maikop Burial in Georgia, and he suggested that this grave type and burial custom has become diffused from north to south through the Euphrates Valley²⁹.

Apart from the royal tomb in Arslantepe, graves dating to the Kura-Araxes Culture in Eastern Anatolia are very limited. Among them the significant one is the cemetery of Suyatağı in the Karakaya Dam Area. In this small cemetery area a few cist-stone graves have been found during excavations. These graves recall the royal tomb by way of their construction technique, but they are poor in relation to funerary gifts, which consist mostly of Kura-Araxes pottery (Fig. 5)³⁰. From the point of view of our topic the excavations in the Keban Dam area on the Altınova plain presented very limited evidence. A few burials have been found at Norşuntepe, which is also a regional centre, during excavations; one of them is a pot burial containing a child and located at level XXVI (transition level from Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age I)³¹. No detailed information has been published about this burial (Fig. 5).

Also a young male skeleton has been found under the floor of a building dating to the Early Bronze Age II (level XXIII). The type of grave which housed this skeleton is unclear. An interesting detail in this burial is the placement of flat stones on/over the shoulders of the skeleton, which is surrounded by a kind of winding sheet

²⁰ Hauptmann 1979: 55, Lev. 28,3.

²¹ Palmieri 1974: 138, Figs. 6.

²² Esin 1979: 109.

²³ Palmieri/Hauptmann/Hess 1998: 115; Frangipane: 2003, 19-21.

²⁴ Frangipane 2008: 41.

²⁵ Frangipane 1998: 294.

²⁶ Frangipane/Di Nocera/Hauptmann/Morbidelli/Palmieri/Sadori/Schultz/Schmidtschultz 2001: 108-110.

²⁷ Marro 2011: 297.

²⁸ Frangipane, 2001: 1-2, 6-8.

²⁹ Palumbi 2007: 28, Fig. 8-10.

³⁰ Darga 1989: 68, Fig. 1-4

³¹ Hauptmann 1982: 24, Lev. 25, 2



Figure 6: The Royal Tomb in Arslantepe / *Arslantepe'deki Krali Mezar* (Işıklı 2011: Res. 28A)

(Fig. 6)³². Apart from these details, there is no information in publications. Also in the EBA III levels (level 6-8) of Norşuntepe a few child burials in pots placed under the floors of houses have been found. Other small details about these pot burials are that some burials have been

³² Hauptmann 1982: 22, Lev. 19, 4.

put in a basket, and some have wheat scattered over them³³. All burials at Norşuntepe presented with a very poor funerary gifts inventory and were mostly comprised of pottery. It must be remembered that all of these details are discrete samples, and they can never reflect

³³ Hauptmann 1976: 42, 54, Lev. 42, 1-2.

burial traditions of the region. In Pağnik Öreni, which is another excavated site in the Keban Dam area, some pots contained child burials and an adult male skeleton, like Norşuntepe, and they have been discovered under the floors of houses located at level VIII dating to the EBA III. The adult male skeleton was covered by large pottery sherds³⁴. Other excavated Kura-Araxian sites within the scope of the Keban Project presented very similar results. In levels of EBA III of Tepecik a pit burial including a baby skeleton was found³⁵; at EBA levels of Pulur/Sakyol³⁶, Han İbrahim Şah³⁷ and Taşkun Mevkii³⁸, pits and pots mostly including children or baby burials have been discovered under the floors of the houses. Generally funerary gifts of Keban sites are extremely poor (Fig.5).

Apart from the Upper Euphrates Valley, the other important expansion areas of the Kura-Araxes Culture in Eastern Anatolia are the Erzurum-Kars Plateau and the Van Lake Basin. These areas are more unproductive in terms of our topic, as excavated sites are very few and there are no cemeteries among them. Also there are no burials dated to the earlier phase of the culture. In the Van Lake Basin, Ernis Cemetery, which is located on the north side of Van Lake, is an interesting and puzzling sample regarding our topic. According to records at Van Museum, there is a striking group of Kura-Araxian potteries which came from cist-stone graves in Ernis Cemetery by illegal excavations in the 1930's, although later excavations in the 1960's on this cemetery area show that this graveyard had been used mostly during the Iron Age³⁹. Unfortunately no Kura-Araxian materials have been found in the graves at Ernis in these later excavations.

As for the Erzurum-Kars Plateau, the excavations at Sos Höyük, a single systematic excavation on the Erzurum-Kars Plateau, presented some evidence concerning burial traditions of later phases of the Kura-Araxes Culture. Two deep pit burials located at EBA III levels of the site have been found. In one of the graves an adult male skeleton in a contracted position (Fig. 7), along with a black burnished pot and a necklace which is made of shells, have been discovered (Fig. 5)⁴⁰.

The other deep pit grave presented a young male skeleton which might have been thrown in violently, along with a pot with special decoration and a ring made of shells as funerary gifts. According to A. Sagona, the excavator of Sos Höyük, these graves have traces of Kura-Araxian

burial tradition but, at the same time, they point to a cultural transformation at the site and in the region, just as the end of the Early Bronze Age, namely EBA III period, is an indication of a cultural alteration for Eastern Anatolia⁴¹.

When considering the limited evidence centered on Eastern Anatolia, we reach the following results: The evidence concerning burial practices of the Kura-Araxes Culture in Eastern Anatolia is very limited and fragmented. There is no systematic excavation at any graveyard in the region. The evidence is coming from discrete graves and they show variations. These graves are mostly burials containing children and baby skeletons and located under the floors of the houses/buildings. In terms of grave gifts they are extremely poor. At present it is not easy to reveal the outlines of Kura-Araxian burial traditions in Eastern Anatolia because of insufficient evidence. In terms of our topic, the royal tomb at Arslantepe is an extremely striking sample; however it is a unique sample and cannot reflect the general situation of the region. Also it is not easy to say that the results attained for the Southern Caucasus are acceptable for Eastern Anatolia. Our data is limited about this matter. According to available evidence we can suggest that the cist-stone graves, which are the most widespread type of the Southern Caucasus, have spread to the south via the Euphrates Valley during the Early Bronze Age. Apart from the Upper Euphrates Valley, the rest of Eastern Anatolia, namely the Erzurum-Kars Plateau and Van Lake Basin, is unclear about burial practices. Except for the royal tomb at Arslantepe, all known grave samples, mostly placed within buildings, belong to later phases of the Kura-Araxes Culture.

THE NEWLY-DISCOVERED KURA-ARAXES TOMBS AT ALAYBEYİ HÖYÜK ON THE ERZURUM PLAIN

Alaybeyi Höyük is located 28 km from Erzurum city and is to be found in the midst of agricultural fields on the Erzurum Plain (Fig. 1). The site was first observed within the scope of construction activities of the TANAP Project in the winter of 2016 and the excavation works on the site were started soon after. These works continued between 2016 and 2017, and although limited, they presented significant and striking results concerning regional archaeology. The work was undertaken in a narrow corridor because of the rescue excavation. (Figs. 7-8) Because of this, the detailed stratigraphic sequence and architectural layers cannot be seen in their entirety. However, as a consequence of the excavations, the stratigraphy of Alaybeyi Höyük has been produced in general terms. Accordingly the earliest level of the site can be dated to the Chalcolithic Period. Because of groundwater, earlier levels could not be reached. The

³⁴ Harper 1970: 132.

³⁵ Esin 1979: 91, Lev. 55, 4.

³⁶ Koşay 1976: 9.

³⁷ Ertem 1982: 19, Lev. 13, 3-5.

³⁸ French 1974: 34.

³⁹ Çilingiroğlu 1983: 27.

⁴⁰ Sagona 2004: 480, Fig. 2.

⁴¹ Sagona 1999: 206.



Figure 7: Aerial Photo of Alaybeyi Höyük / *Alaybeyi Höyüğü Hava Fotoğrafi* (Alaybeyi Archive)

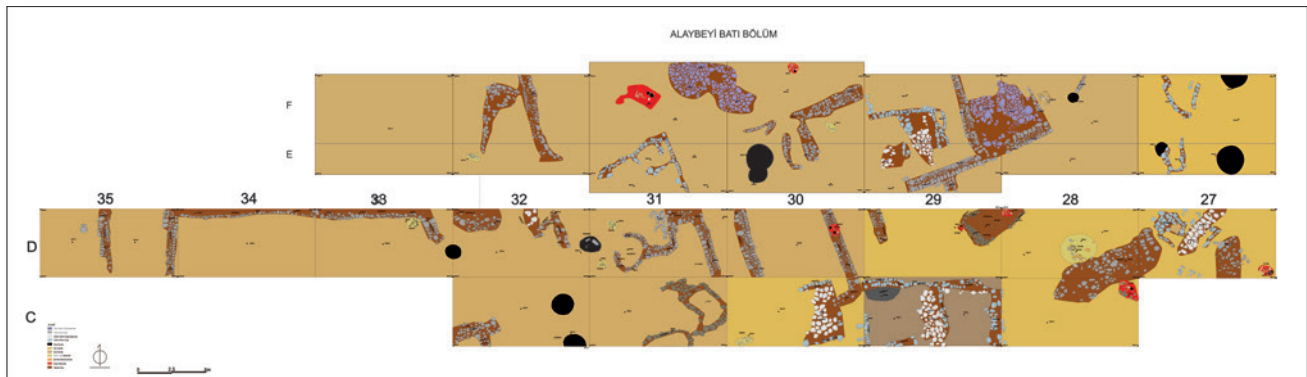


Figure 8: Plan of Excavated Areas at Alaybeyi Höyük / *Alaybeyi Höyüğünde Kazılan Alanları Gösteren Plan* (Alaybeyi Archive)

radiocarbon sample taken from this level gives 4721 BC – 4553 BC, and so the existence of the Middle Chalcolithic period for the Erzurum region has been unlocked. The earliest level presented just a few pottery sherds.

The following level belonged to the Early Bronze Age and produced well-known Kura-Araxes materials. Unfortunately sub-layers of this cultural horizon could not be distinguished and there are no radiocarbon dates from it. Apart from some architectural remains, the fragmentary portable hearths, a few typical Kura-Araxes pots, some of them well-decorated, and terracotta idols can be ranked among them. Also a group of graves, the subject of this article, has been found in the same level. (Fig. 8)

The upper level of the site, dating to the Iron Age, has Early and Late sub-phases. The latest level presented Iron Age materials well-known all across the Eastern Anatolian Highland and its neighbouring regions. Typical Early Iron Age pottery sherds are dominant among findings at this level, and there are stone and clay objects among the Iron Age materials. In the same level some graves containing Early Iron Age pottery have been found as well. The second phases of the upper level produced typical painted Late Iron Age pottery and had radiocarbon dates of 401-200 B.C.

A total of eight graves dating to the Kura-Araxes Culture have been found at Alaybeyi Höyük. Two graves have been found during the excavations in 2016, the others have been found in 2017 (Figs. 9-10).

Grave 1: (16-ALB-D16-M1)

This grave is a simple pit grave and located in D16 trench. The dimensions of the grave are 0.72 x 0.40 meter and its depth is 0.10 meter. The position of the body is hocker (fetal position) and its orientation is east and west, facing south. According to anthropological analysis it could be a teenager who was fifteen years old. Two pots were placed in the front of the face and both vessels are typical Kura-Araxes Pottery (Fig. 9). An interesting detail concerning one of the pots has been observed. There are traces of a restoration on this pot. According to analysis a kind of adhesive including herbal tar, turpentine and resin was used for repairing the pot.

Grave 2 (16-ALB-D27-M1)

This pit grave is located in D27 trench. The dimensions of the pit are 0.90 x 0.53 meters. Its depth is 0.75 meters. The hocker-positioned body has east and west direction, facing south too, like the body in Grave 2. A group of pottery in nested form has been found as gravegoods. Similarly, the pottery has been put in front of the body. They are well-known samples of Kura-Araxes pottery. One of them is a large jar and the other is a smaller jar and bowl. The skeleton belonged to a 25-45 aged adult male (Figs. 9-11).

Grave 3 (16-ALB-D28-M2)

This simple earth (pit) grave is distinct in that it has been found in a house. Its measurements are 1.12 x 0.50 meters, and its depth is 1.43 meters. The body in hocker position is in northeastern-southwestern orientation, facing north. The grave is not rich in terms of gravegoods, with just a small bowl dating to the Kura-Araxes period and a bone whorl which was found close to the skeleton (Figs. 9-11).

Grave 4 (16-ALB-D28-M3)

This pit grave measures 0.54 x 0.21 x 0.10 meters. The skeleton in the pit has not been well-preserved. According to anthropological analysis it was an adult aged between 11 and 12. The hocker-positioned body was laid down in north-south orientation. Relatively, the goods of this grave are richer: white limestone beads along with a Kura-Araxian jar have been found. A total of 46 beads are in cylindrical form (Figs. 9-11).

Grave 5 (16-ALB-D28-M4)

This pit grave is 1.48 x 1.00 meters and 0.50 meters deep. The position of the body lying down in a western-eastern orientation is hocker and it faces north. The goods of the pit grave consist of two jars which belonged to the Kura-Araxes period (Figs. 9-11).

Grave 5 (16-ALB-D28-M5)

This pit grave was found during the 2016 season. The edges of the pit grave are enclosed with large and small stones, and three stone lines are preserved. This grave is in better condition than the other. The measurements of the pit-grave are 0.86 x 0.53 meters and its depth is 1.20 meters. The face of the body which is in a northeast-southwest orientation faces to the west. The skeleton in the pit belonged to a male who was aged 25-45 years. Within the grave were found the bones of a goat, which makes us think of the possibility that they were the remains of a funeral meal or food offerings. Apart from these, a large and small jar and a bowl have been found around the body (Figs. 10-11).

Grave 7 (17-ALB-F30-M 1)

This pit grave has measurements of 0.70 x 0.30 meters. The skeleton was badly damaged and was lying down in a southeastern-northwestern orientation, facing south. According to anthropological analysis, this grave belonged to a male who was aged 25-45 years. One bowl and one jar have been found around the head of the skeleton (Figs. 10-11).

Grave 8 (17-ALB-F 31-M 1)

This grave has a rectangular shape and its edges are enclosed with stones. Its dimensions are 1.90 x 1.20 meters. The skeleton inside it, a male who was aged 25-45 years, was badly damaged. The body was in hocker position lying in a northwest and southeast orientation, facing south. The measurements of the pit grave are 1.90 x 1.20 meters. The edges of the pit have been enclosed with stones. Two vessels, a large jar with lid, a small and a large bowl, were placed on the northeastern corner of the stone line as gravegoods (Figs. 10-11).

GENERAL EVALUATION ON THE KURA-ARAXIAN TOMBS OF ALAYBEYI HÖYÜK

The field works at Alaybeyi Höyük were undertaken in a narrow corridor 70 meters long and 20 meters wide (Fig. 6). In spite of significant results being obtained concerning Kura-Araxes burial customs in Eastern Anatolia, the general situation concerning graves could not be understood properly. For instance, the graves' relationship with the settlement is not clear. Are they in a graveyard or not? Are they discrete graves? Many questions are still awaiting replies because of the limited and narrow work area. However, significant details have been appointed:



Figure 9: Kura-Araxes Tombs at Alaybeyi Höyük – 1 / *Alaybeyi Höyüğü Kura-Aras Mezarları – 1 (Alaybeyi Archive)*

Eight graves in total have been found, and all of them are pit-graves. They are very simple pits, and some of them have edges which are enclosed with stones. All of the bodies in the graves were placed in the hocker position, although there is no common placement for the burials. According to anthropological analysis almost all skeletons are young males – there are no females. The grave goods of the pit-graves are not rich, but grave-goods have been found in every grave. They are generally pots and typical Kura-Araxes pottery, and there are beads, stone and bone whorls. There are no metals. A few animal bones have been found in a pit-grave, and this makes us think that a funerary meal was a burial custom (Fig. 9-11).

CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, graveyards are the sources from which we gain information about diverse details, ranging from socio-political structures to the technological expansion of societies. This state is more valid for societies without written sources. The Kura-Araxes Culture, which was a hallmark of the Early Bronze Age across an enormous area from beyond the Caucasus Mountain range to the Central Anatolian Plateau, is also a cultural phenomenon without written sources. The burial practices of this cultural phenomenon with multi-components are less known. The evidence concerning this subject usually comes from excavations at sites in the Southern Caucasus during the period of Soviet Russia, and their reliability is



Figure 10: The Kura-Araxes Tombs at Alaybeyi Höyük – 2 / *Alaybeyi Höyüğü Kura-Aras Mezarları - 2 (Alaybeyi Archive)*



Figure 11: The Grave Goods from Kura-Araxes Tombs at Alaybeyi Höyük / *Alaybeyi Kura-Aras Mezarlarından Ele Geçen Mezar Hediyleri (Alaybeyi Archive)*

mostly problematic. According to this data Kura-Araxian societies conducted their burials outside of settlements and generally used earthen and cist-stone graves. Their earliest graves dated to the end of the IVth and beginning of the IIIrd millenium B.C. It is not easy to classify their chronological and typological classifications according to the available evidence. Each type can be used in the same period and the same graveyard. The Kura-Araxian burials consist of individual or collective burials with bodies placed in half-bent or contracted positions in the graves. In Kura-Araxian graves funerary gifts show diversity from pottery to metal. The most widespread gifts are pots, jewellery (from metals to shells), weapons (daggers to arrowheads), and beads (from bone to semi-precious stones).

As for burial customs and rituals, our knowledge about this matter is extremely limited. We can imagine that there might have been a funerary meal if we consider the animal bones which have been found in the graves. Also, according to some scholars, the arrangements and locations of the funerary gifts in the graves could have been related to funerary rituals and they might have symbolic meanings. The royal tomb at Arslantepe is a particularly interesting sample about this matter. According to Frangipane the arrangement of funerary gifts and the position of the four young males buried here might have symbolic meaning and be related to a mystic funerary ritual with unknown details.

As for Eastern Anatolia, the lack of sufficient evidence in the region causes confusion and disappointment. The new projects such as the excavations at Alaybeyi Höyük are not enough to enlighten the picture because most of the new excavations are rescue projects. We need more systematic and regional projects. Although almost twenty sites have been excavated throughout the region, no graveyards have been discovered up until today. Only a few individual burials have been found inside of the settlements.

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