

Neolithic Graves and Burial Customs in Nakhchivan

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Abstract

The article draws attention to the features of the burial that existed in the Neolithic era in the South Caucasus. This issue was analyzed on the basis of the archaeological materials of the Kultepe I settlement located in the Nakhchivan region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The graves and grave equipment discovered in the middle of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century from the place of residence were summarized and included in the research and periodized. Grave equipment stored in the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan was selected as the main research object of the study. They were discovered during the archaeological excavations in Kultepe I in 1951-1964 and handed over to the museum. According to the mutual analysis of the archaeological excavation report and the records in the museum's inventory book, first of all, the grave equipment was grouped according to the graves they belonged to, then it was determined that 9 of these graves belong to layer 1a, and the rest belong to layer 1b. These layers were attributed to the Chalcolithic period. However, in the second decade of the 21st century, the coal analyzes taken during the archaeological excavations carried out again by the Azerbaijani-French archaeological expedition, which included the author, showed that the settlement here began in the third quarter of the 7th century BC. This date makes it possible to attribute the burials discovered from layer 1a of Kultepe I, as well as the grave goods, to the early phase of the Ceramic Neolithic. Graves belonging to this phase are notable for their densely packed burials, the abundance of straw-covered intact vessels, and the fact that they are all found in only one excavation site (V site). Probably, during the early phase of the ceramic Neolithic (I phase), burials were carried out in a separate place. Graves discovered from layer 1b, unlike I phase, were also found in other excavation sites, with little or no equipment. The dead were buried wrapped under the floor of the houses. In terms of the structure of the graves, their different directions, and the fact that the skeletons inside are buried on the right or left side, they are analogous to the Neolithic graves of Chalagantepe, Masis-blur, Haji Firuz, Chatal Hoyuk, Hajilar. This fact shows that in the last phase of the Neolithic period, there was a burial custom with common features for Nakhchivan, Anatolia and Urmia basin.

Keywords: South Caucasus, Kultepe I settlement, Neolithic period, grave equipment, burial custom

Неолітичні могили та поховальні звичаї в Нахчівані

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Анотація

У статті звертається увага на особливості поховання, що існувало в епоху неоліту на Південному Кавказі. Це питання було проаналізовано на основі археологічних матеріалів поселення Культепе І, розташованого в Нахчеванському районі Азербайджанської Республіки. Узагальнено та включено до дослідження і періодизовано могили та могильний інвентар, виявлені в середині ХХ – на початку ХХІ століття з місця проживання. Основним об'єктом дослідження було обрано могильний інвентар, що зберігається в Археологічному фонді Національного музею історії Азербайджану. Вони були виявлені під час археологічних розкопок в Культепе І в 1951-1964 роках і передані музею. Відповідно до спільного аналізу звіту археологічних розкопок та записів в інвентарній книзі музею, насамперед могильний інвентар згруповано за могилами, до яких вони належали, потім встановлено, що 9 із цих могил належать до шару 1а, а решта належать до шару 1b. Ці шари віднесли до епохи Мідного віку. Однак у другому десятилітті ХХІ століття аналізи вугілля, зроблені під час археологічних розкопок, знову проведених азербайджансько-французькою археологічною експедицією, до складу якої входив і автор, показали, що поселення тут почалося в третій чверті VII століття до н.е. Ця дата дозволяє віднести виявлені поховання з шару 1а Культепе І, а також могильний інвентар до ранньої фази керамічного неоліту. Могили, що відносяться до цієї фази, вирізняються своїми щільними похованнями, великою кількістю вкритих соломою непошкоджених посудин і тим, що всі вони знайдені лише в одній розкопці (місця V). Ймовірно, на ранній фазі керамічного неоліту (І фаза) поховання здійснювалися в окремому місці. Могили, виявлені з шару 1b, на відміну від І фази, також були знайдені в інших місцях розкопок, з незначним обладнанням або без нього. Померлих ховали загорнутими під підлогою будинків. З точки зору структури могил, їх різного спрямування, а також того факту, що скелети всередині поховані з правого або лівого боку, вони аналогічні неолітичним могилам Чалагантепе, Масіс-Блур, Хаджі Фіруз, Чатал Хоюк, Хаджілар. Цей факт свідчить про те, що в останній фазі неоліту існував звичай поховання з загальними рисами для Нахчівані, Анатолії та басейну Урмії.

Ключові слова: Південний Кавказ, поселення Культепе І, неоліт, могильний інвентар, поховальний звичай

Introduction.

Although the relations of the South Caucasus with the Middle East in the Neolithic period have been investigated from many aspects, grave monuments and burial customs have not been widely investigated. Studies show that the graves and their finds were among the main attributes reflecting the specific features of the era to which they belong. Kultepe I settlement attracts attention from this point of view. The place of residence is in the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on the left bank of Nakhchivanchay. This territory is also important in the study of relations between these regions, as it is located in an important strategic position connecting the South Caucasus with the Middle East. The first extensive archaeological excavations in the Kultepe I settlement were carried out by O. Habibullayev in 1951-1964. He determined that the monument is multilayered and attributed the lowest layer (depth: 13-22.5 meters) to the Neolithic (1a) and Chalcolithic (1b) periods (Habibullayev, 1959, p. 14). However, in later studies, both of these layers have been attributed to the Chalcolithic period (Habibullayev, 1982, p. 25). During the excavations carried out in 2013-2018 in the place of residence by the Azerbaijani-French archaeological expedition, which included the author, led by Professor V.Bakhshaliyev and C.Marro, it was determined that there were 2 different layers, "1st layer" and "2nd layer" (Morro et al., 2019, p. 88). During further research, it was found that layer "1a" corresponds to "layer 1", and layer "1b" corresponds to "layer 2" (Bakhshaliyev, 2022, p. 139). In this article, we will conventionally call "1a" and "1st layer" located between 19-22 meters, phase I, and "1b" and "layer 2" located at a depth of 13-18 meters as phase II. The thickness of the cultural layer covering both phases reaches about 9 meters. In those layers, 85 graves discovered during the excavations conducted by O. Habibullayev belong to the Chalcolithic period (Habibullayev, 1982, p. 39). 12 of them are children, one is an adult with a child, and 75 are elderly people. Our examination of the grave equipment found in these graves in 2021 provided new facts about their era and other unique features.

The article is supposed to investigate the degree of influence of the South Caucasian-Middle Eastern relations on burial customs. The purpose of the article is to include those materials in the scientific circulation.

Method and material. Comparative analysis and typological description methods were mainly used in the research process. Grave equipment discovered in 1951-1964 from layer 1a of the Kultepe settlement was selected as the main research object (33). They are stored in the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (AF 10-11). Based on the examination of the museum's inventory book, they were grouped according to the graves they belonged to. In order to determine the structure and burial characteristics of the graves of this period, the reports of the excavations conducted in

the 20th century and 21st century were compared and analyzed.

Structure of the graves. The depth level where the graves are located indicates that 9 of them belong to the I phase. They were found at different depths of the V area between 21.4 and 18.6 meters. Other graves belong to II phase. The dead were buried in oval-shaped grave pits in a wrapped position. The depth of the grave pits reaches about 25-30 cm, they do not differ much from each other in terms of size. Their diameters were between 1x1.5 meters. The length of skeletons placed in such graves in a wrapped position varies from 78 cm to 1.26 meters (Habibullayev, 1962, p. 5, 16). Skeletons have different directions: in some graves it is placed in the direction of the south, in some towards the northeast, and in some towards the west.

Graves are mostly single burials. Two people were buried face to face in one grave. Most of the buried people are wrapped in mats (Habibullayev, 1959, p. 21-23). This type of burial feature is more clearly observed in the grave discovered in 2016 in the lowest layer of the settlement (depth: 947.06 meters) (Figure 1, a). Remains of mats were recorded on the skeleton in this grave (Figure 1, c), a necklace of beads was found around the neck (Figure 1, 1b), and other remains were recorded under the skull.

Burial types. There are 3 types of burials in the graves. I type is associated with right-sided burials (Figure 2, 1). In one of them, the dead person was placed in a sitting position with his legs bent in a rectangular shape from the knees (Figure 2, 2). Burial type II is left-sided. Three such graves are particularly noteworthy. In one of them, the skeleton is in sitting position (Figure 3, 1). The person in the second grave was buried tightly wrapped, in the NE-SW direction (Figure 3, 2). The burial feature of the same direction was observed in Haji Firuz settlement (Voigt, 1983, Table 12). The skeleton in the third grave had circular holes on the back of the neck, where the elbow bends from the abdomen, and near the toes (Figure 3, 3). Presumably, these were the location of small supports so that the top of the grave did not collapse. Other graves are partially destroyed. It was possible to determine the size of one of them. In 2016, during the research conducted under the leadership of V.Bakhshaliyev and C.Marro, this grave was discovered in the field J excavated under the supervision of the author, and it is NNE-SSE oriented. The dimensions of the oval grave pit are 0.70x1.10 meters. The human skeleton inside (018) is located on a brick platform on its left side. The platform was 0.9 m wide and 1.2 m long. Such platforms were found in the 6th layer of the Chatal hoyuk settlement. J. Mellaart emphasizes that this is necessary for repeated burials, noting that when new burials are carried out, the bricks of the platform are removed, which is accompanied by a certain degree of deformation of the old skeletons (Mellaart, p. 103). In III burial type, the dead were buried on their backs. Burials of this type were found in 6 graves. One of them is recorded in layer 1a (№71). In

this grave, the skeleton was placed on its back, with only the legs slightly bent to the side and painted with ochre. Another remarkable feature of this grave is the discovery of a color patterned bowl. In layer 1b, 5 graves related to this type of burial were discovered (Graves No. 37, 43, 52, 53 and 61). They were recorded at a depth of 16.6-18 meters. In all these graves, the legs of the dead person are bent to the left, and the head is placed in the northeast direction (Habibullayev, 1982, p. 61). Only in grave No. 52 the skull of the skeleton is in the SW direction. In all such graves, a "gift of the dead" was recorded. They mainly consist of beads. In some of them, in addition, the remnants of mats and goat horns were placed. Although the shape of these graves, the direction of the skeletons inside, and burial customs are the same for both phases, they differ in terms of grave equipment.

Grave equipment. It is clear from the examination of the inverter book, where grave equipment belonging to layer 1a was registered, that all of them were discovered from excavation site V. Another noteworthy aspect is that the grave equipment of this layer is richer. In this regard, the 69th grave deserves attention. In this grave 1, a human skeleton was laid on its left side and strong bent with its head to the north. 3 polished bowls, 3 microlites, 290 beads were placed next to it. One of the containers is biconically shaped. It is made of straw-containing red clay. The surface is engobed and polished. There are small sunken lines on the surface of the bowl (Figure 4, 1). The other two bowls have a slightly convex-cylindrical body and a straw cover (Figure 4, 2-3). The beads are made of carnelian (Figure 4, 4). Two of the obsidians are unilaterally retouched, being represented by rectangular-trapezoidal plaques (Figure 4, 5-7).

Grave No. 71 differs from others in its burial feature and equipment. The deceased was buried on his back in this grave, which was recorded at a depth of 20.8 meters. The grave inventory consists of 1 painted bowl, a pear-shaped stone weaving tool, obsidian plates and beads. The small-sized bowl is thick-walled, made of yellowish-red clay mixed with sand (Figure 5, 1).

Other graves were similar to each other in terms of burial features, differing only in the objects inside them. A stone mace was placed as a "gift of the dead" in grave 76, and a sickle frame made of deer horn was placed in grave number 75. (Figure 6, 1-2). The length of the surviving part of the sickle frame made of horn is 24.4 cm, the length of the cut opened in it is 10.3 cm, the depth is 0.7-1 cm (Habibullayev, 1982, Tab. VII, 10). Such finds were represented by an obsidian tablet in grave 74, white flat beads, flint and obsidian tablets in grave 68, and a straw-covered bowl in grave 66. (Figure 6, 3-5). This grayish-red bowl, like the others, is roughly made of very straw clay, and differs only in size. Its height is 9.5 cm, muzzle diameter is 18.5 cm, and seat diameter is 14.5 cm. A similar burial feature is observed in grave 65, which was recorded in the upper layer of this layer. The "gifts of the dead" in it consist of 2 straw-covered bowls

and obsidian plates. One of the bright red bowls has a sunken seat and straw cover (Figure 7, 1). The height of this bowl is 8.6-9 cm, the diameter of the seat is 11.8 cm, and the diameter of the muzzle is 15.8-16.4 cm. The other sample also contains straw and is well cooked (Figure 7, 2). It should be noted that straw-covered and intact vessels were discovered mainly from I phase graves. Grave equipment belonging to II phase consists mainly of decorative items. Of the 51 graves belonging to this stage, beads were placed in 24, tools in 17, and only the remains of mats were found in 8 graves. Ornaments are made of turquoise, gematite, cerdolic, agate stones, some of them are of other types of yellow-white stones, and a small amount of paste, bone and copper. These exhibits include stone fish ears and copper beads found in grave No. 56 (Fig. 8, 1-7), white beads found in grave No. 31 (Fig. 8, 8-18), as well as 312 pieces of bones, beads, stones and stones found in grave No. 53. refers to bone beads (Figure 8, 19-20).

Discussion. The graves discovered from Kultepe I are similar in many respects to the graves discovered from the Neolithic monuments of the South Caucasus and the Middle East. This factor was directly related to the geographical location of the place of residence. The burial custom recorded here was found in Chalagantepe, Alikomektepe (Narimanov, 1987, c. 87), the VI layer of Khatunarch, the lower layers of Masis-blur (Martirosyan-Olshansky et al., 2013, p. 145), Neolithic monuments such as Kortik Tepe (Harmankaya, 1998, Fig. 3), Chatal Hoyuk, IV layer of Hajilar settlement of Turkey (Ozkaya, Coshkun, 2011, p. 102; 89), Jabal al-Buhais in the United Arab Emirates (Uerpmann, 2006, BHS-85). About 500 skeletons in wrapped form buried under houses and places of worship were recorded in the Chatal hoyuk burial mound. Few of them were buried whole by wrapping in a mat or cloth (Kushnareva, Chubinishvili, 1970, p. 183).

It is similar to the monuments of the Urmiya basin and Anatolia in terms of the different orientations of the skeletons. In Kuruchay, all those who died in such graves, which are similar to the graves of the XXI layer of the last Neolithic (Duru, 1994, fig. 23), were buried in different directions. There are also similarities with neighboring regions in terms of burial of the dead on the right and left sides. Such burials were recorded in the Neolithic settlements of Western Iran (Darabi et al., 2011, fig. 12), in layer IV of Yarimtepe monument I in Iraq (Merpert and Munchayev, 1987, Plate 1a), in the Late Neolithic layers of Fikirtepe and Pendik monuments in Turkey (Yakar, 1991, p. 207), and in layer VI of Chatal hoyuk settlement (Mellaart, 1965, fig. 60). There are more similarities with the graves discovered from Haji Firuz settlement and Chatal hoyuk. Chatal hoyuk was dated to 6500-5900 BC (Mellaart, 1965, p. 115), Haji Firuz was dated to the period from the last quarter of VII millennium BC to 5500 BC (Voigt, 1983, p. 636). These facts make it possible to attribute the graves discovered

from layers 1a and 1b of Kultepe to the 4th quarter of the 7th millennium BC to the beginning of the 6th millennium BC. Some different elements are observed in the graves belonging to layer 1a (I phase). In these graves, straw-covered and intact vessels occupy the main place. It is also noteworthy that all the grave equipment of this phase was found only in area V. This fact was revealed as a result of our examination of the exhibits in the inventory book where grave equipment was recorded. Those documents were compiled on the basis of the reports submitted by O. Habibullayev (Habibullayev, 1962, p. 5, 16). It should be noted that the excavations conducted by O. Habibullayev in Kultepe were continued to the mainland only in excavation areas III and V. In time, O. Habibullayev put forward layer 1a, which he attributed to the Late Neolithic, based on the stratigraphy of the III area, but he refused after the excavation of the V area. It can be seen that the absence of the same stratigraphy in V area is due to the fact that the area consists of graves. It is also an interesting fact that while the 19-22-meter-deep layer of the V area is represented by graves, there are no examples of graves at the same depth level of the III area. Probably, there was a separate space for burials in the I Phase of the Ceramic Neolithic. The graves of

the II stage were found under the floors of the houses. Such graves were found in Amiranis-gora area in Georgia (Chubinishvili, 1963, p. 98), in almost all the houses of the Late Neolithic period of the Haji Firuz settlement located in the Lake Urmia basin (Guliyeva, 2019, p. 23-24). O. Habibullayev connected burial on the floor with the worship of the dead (Habibullayev, 1959, p. 131), and J. Mellaart explained with the belief that the deceased still remains a member of the family (Mellaart, 1965, p. 102). Both views allow us to say that belief in the afterlife was strong in the Neolithic period. Research shows that there was a burial tradition with common characteristics for the Nakhchivan, Anatolian and Urmiye basins in the last phase of the Neolithic period.

Conclusion. Research shows that in the last phase of the Neolithic period, there was a burial custom with common features for Nakhchivan, Anatolia and Urmia basin. This factor was directly related to the geographical location of the place of residence. Only the fact that all the graves belonging to the I phase of the Neolithic layer of Kultepe I were discovered in the V area indicates that there are some different characteristics. It is likely that there was a separate place for the burial of the dead during the early stage of the Ceramic Neolithic.



Figure 1. Beads (b) and mat remains (c) from a grave recorded in the Neolithic layer of Kultepe I (Bakshaliyev et al., 2017, fig. 44).



Figure 3. Graves with left-sided burials: 1-KT-16, E-229; 2-KT-14, A-055; 3-KT-16, A-192 (Bakshaliyev et al., 2017, fig. 30-31).



Figure 2. Graves with right-sided burials: 1-KT-14, A055; 2-A066 (Bakshaliyev et al., 2017, fig. 27).



Figure 4. "Gifts of the dead" found in grave No. 69, unearthed from a depth of 20.6 m in area V: 1-NHAM, AF. Inv.№-Kt.64; 14843; 2-Kt.64, 14848; 3-14850; 4-14859; 5-8: 14861 (Photo Z.Guliyeva).

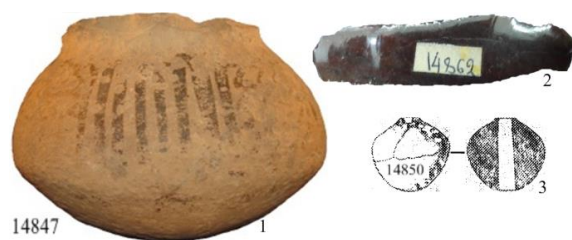


Figure 5. Equipment of grave No. 71 belonging to V area: 1- NHAM, AF. Inv.№14847; 2-14862; 3-14850; 14851 (Photo Z. Guliyeva).



Figure 7. Equipment of grave No. 65 belonging to V area: 1-NHAM, AF. Inv.№907; 2-14049 (Photo Z. Guliyeva).

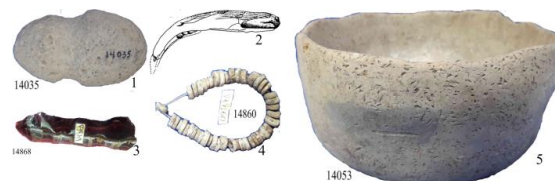


Figure 6. Equipment of other graves discovered in V field: 1- NHAM, AF. Inv.№14035-grave 76; 2- grave 75; 3-14868 - grave 74; 4-14860 - grave 68; 5-14053 - grave 66 (Photo Z. Guliyeva).



Figure 8. Grave equipment found in layer 1b: 1-7-NHAM, AF.Kt. 61-13954; 8-18-13937; 19-20-13944 (Photo Z. Guliyeva).

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