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## INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH OF ETHNOGRAPHIC- ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE IN GANJA BASED ON MATERIALS OF KURGANS

**Abstract:** *Scientific paper deals with the research of ancient kurgans in Ganja based on various academic sources and scientific materials, archive documents, local craftsmanship samples of contemporary international ethnographic and archeological excavations in the territory of city and around area. On the basis of innovative scientific methods have been researched the basic features of historical-cultural heritage of Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.*

**Key words:** *ethnographic research, archeological excavations, Ganja, Azerbaijan, handicraft samples, multidisciplinary research, innovative methods.*

**Language:** *English*

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### Introduction

The area located on the northern outskirts of the modern city of Ganja that is part of the Heydar Aliyev Park. The area along the Ganja River, another affluent of the Kur River, marked by the presence of a concentration of kurgans dated to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age. This area has been under investigation since the XX century, but more recently, due to the creation of the Heydar Aliyev Park, the governor of Ganja created a task for local scholars, directed by

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, who excavated some of the kurgans located in this region [5, 16-17].

Ganja Region Kurgan Archaeological Project (GaRKAP) is a joint Azerbaijan-Italian project that aims at investigating the spread of the tradition of burying the dead in large funerary chambers covered with circular tumuli - that is, kurgans - in the southern Caucasus during a period ranging from the fourth to the first millennium BCE. It is in this region that large

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numbers of kurgans, dating to the Early Bronze Age (that is, the Kur-Araz period) through to the Iron Age, have been identified.

The aim of GaRKAP project is to excavate all the remaining kurgans, then create an archaeological park to be presented to the local communities at the end of the archaeological work. In particular, during the summer of 2018-2019 GaRKAP excavated a medium-sized kurgan, which had been badly disturbed by looters, but still brought to light archaeological materials that can be associated with the Ganja-Garabagh (Chodžali-Kedabeg) archaeological phase, dated to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age [17, 8-21].

Other kurgans dated to the Kur-Araz period in have shown that once the dead had been disposed of inside the funerary chamber, the whole chamber was set on fire.

Thus, the conditions were created for establishing as the place dedicated to housing the dead. The plateau was in use for this purpose for a long time and was not utilized for other human activities, except for pastoralism or nomadic movements between the creek and the fields to the north. Kurgans in the southern Caucasus dating to the Kur-Araz period have rarely been investigated using detailed stratigraphic analysis of the different phases of construction, use, closing, and, finally, monumentalisation [4, 191-194; 16].

It is with this perspective in mind that GaRKAP tackled the excavation of one of these kurgans. Kurgan 2 consists of a large tumulus that is slightly oval in shape, with a diameter of c. 16 m NW to SE and 17 m NE to SW.

The stone tumulus is made up of two rings of medium-sized stones separated by a soil path that might have served a ritualistic purpose in the end-use phase of the kurgan, when it was monumentalised as a memorial locale embedded in an ancestral landscape. Unfortunately, one quarter of the kurgan was destroyed by a tractor employed to unearth the precious white lime used by the villagers.

The other two pits, not yet completely excavated, are also probably burials. All three have in common the fact that they disturb only the sides and corners of the main funerary chambers of the kurgan, and this does not seem accidental. In fact, it probably testifies to a continuity of use of the kurgan during the Kur-Araz period, probably linking specific individuals with the memory of the community deposited within the large funerary chambers located underneath the tumulus.

### Materials and Methods

Together with the scientific staff of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of ANAS, as a result of archaeological research, a map of ancient burial mounds was prepared in the southern zone of the city, in the Yeni Ganja residential area. On the basis of a

map prepared in 2017, excavations were carried out on five-ancient barrows, where material and cultural remains, samples of local craft, anthropological findings, paleozoological and paleobotanical samples were found, which proves their relationship to the early Bronze Age.

The obsidian and flint tools found in the Gillikdag camp found by I. Jafarzadeh in the village of Bakhchukurd stone scoop suggest that they lived in this territory in the VII-VI millennium BC. e., people were among the founders of the Neolithic culture. The way of life of the Neolithic period (V millennium BC) in the Ganja region continued and created the prerequisites for a new economic development in the Eneolithic.

Archaeological researches show, that during this period, the local population, having moved to a sedentary lifestyle, began to engage in farming and animal husbandry. This is confirmed by osteological remains found in archaeological excavations, which are bones cultivated in the Ganja region in the V millennium BC. e. animals known to us. It is in the IV-III millennium BC. Based on the Eneolithic culture, Ganja has become one of the centers of the Early Bronze Age of the Kur - Araz culture.

Excavations in burial mounds near Ganja showed the presence of rounded pits for ordinary burials and cremation rituals. This is characteristic of Ganja and Garabakh, as well as other ancient tribes in the country. The similarity of the funeral rituals proves the ethnic affinity of the tribes inhabiting the territory. In the village of Yeni Ganja in the ancient territory of Guru Gobu in 2018, during a joint excavation with Italian and French archaeologists, a barrow made of volcanic glass was found in a mound.

In the places of settlements of the middle bronze period a lot of diverse material was found. Discovered stone clubs were used in different areas. Perhaps their more refined designs were used as weapons. In the graves excavated the remains of domestic animals, figures of birds and animals, metal objects, made by hand and on the potter's wheel, ordinary and colored dishes [5, 16-17].

The funerary chamber of Kurgan 1 is oriented SW-NE and it has an entrance dromos — about 2.2 m long and 1 m wide - carved into the bedrock with a few steps cut into the virgin soil. It provides access to the large square funerary chamber, also excavated from the bedrock, which is 5 m wide and c. 7 m long.

Both the dromos and the funerary chamber have internal walls c. 30-35 cm thick and made of mud bricks; in the funerary chamber, they rise 20-30 cm above the edge of the pit. On top of the walls, long wooden beams were placed perpendicular to the entranceway in order to create the roof. The entranceway might have been supported by a wooden beam acting as an architrave, but only future excavations will confirm this.

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Other kurgans dated to the Kur-Araz period in have shown that once the dead had been disposed of inside the funerary chamber, the whole chamber was set on fire. In the case of Kurgans, this practice is recognisable in the burnt beams visible along the edge of the mudbrick walls that define the sides of the funerary chamber as well as the dromos.

This intentional burning of the funerary chamber and dromos must have been visible from a long distance away, creating a theatrical spectacle in association with the bright white of the structure. At the end of this ritual process, probably associated with an act of purification, the roof collapsed inside the chamber and the dromos.

Although the excavation has been temporarily interrupted at the level corresponding to the top of the walls of the chamber, it is possible to hypothesise a tentative sequence of the building phases of the kurgan, aimed at the reconstruction of its biography.

### Multidisciplinary significance of research

In order to better understand the presence and consumption, the most recent developments in archeology, anthropology, archeozoology, archaeobotany, geomorphology and isotopic biogeochemistry were considered. We have thus set up a research project based on a multidisciplinary approach, previously unpublished by its geographical and politico-scientific scope on more than thirty sites - during excavations or formerly excavated - on the current territories of Azerbaijan.

From a methodological point of view, a first part of the project was dedicated to the study of the environmental and economic context related to the cultivation of different materials. The environmental framework of this region, whose ecological diversity is very important, has been described for the pre- and protohistoric periods, thanks to different approaches: the geoarchaeological and geomorphological markers in order to restore the palaeo-landscapes and the cultivable surfaces, and several palynological studies on natural sequences to define the evolution of the landscape and the human impact on the latter. The different remains, direct witnesses of the cultivation of millet, found in archaeological context, in the form of seeds, but also in the form of phytoliths were analyzed. These studies were supplemented by chemical analysis of compounds released by millet into sediments (miliacine).

The markers corresponding to the traces left by the plants on the tools used for food preparation (milling / decorticating), and highlighted by optical

plotology analysis, were also studied. A second part of the project was devoted to the characterization and quantification of millet consumption in humans and animals, based on isotopic analyzes (carbon, nitrogen) carried out on the organic and mineral fractions of consumers' bone tissues (animals and humans) [2; 4].

### Conclusion

The first season of archaeological work by the Azeri-Italian Ganja Regional Kurgan Archaeological Project (GaRKAP) has provided a scientific opportunity to intensify research on understanding the development of the funerary custom of using tumuli (kurgans) in western Azerbaijan between the fourth and first millennia BC. of particular interest is the transformation in the use of Kurgan during the Kur-Araz period, which testifies to a shift from collectivity to individuality in beliefs related to the afterlife among the community using plateau for burying their dead.

Such a transformation is correctly posited by Adam Smith when, dealing with the kurgans of the Middle Bronze Age in southern Caucasus, he states that a kurgan become “earthly machinery for the reproduction of social difference into a cosmic order and into the transcendent sphere of the deities.” Such a perspective is also recognizable during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age - as in the case of Kurgans in Ganja - when the kurgans are most often dedicated to burying individuals accompanied by goods usually comprising a set of pottery vessels, weapons, metal objects, amulets, and special animals; for example, the snake [4; 18; 20].

During the fire, the beams composing the roof would have burnt and collapsed into the chamber, disturbing the whole deposit and making the bone count difficult. According to scientists, in order to facilitate the spread of the flames within the chamber, a sort of chimney was probably located either in the middle of the chamber or at its rear.

Setting up an intentional ritualized fire in the funerary chamber appears to be a distinguishing aspect of the Kur-Araz-period kurgan of western Azerbaijan. In fact, another example was discovered at the site.

In addition, the kurgans of this region appear to be linked with nomadic groups, due to the fact that no contemporaneous settlements can be found in their vicinity. This testifies to the important role of these kurgans in framing the funerary landscape of the people seasonally transiting this region and depositing the dead members of the group in this specific context.

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**Fig. 1. Kurgan 1 in Ganja city.**



**Fig. 2. Earthen pit grave of the Kur-Araz period showing the skeletal remains and funerary goods from kurgan.**

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