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LATE BRONZE AND EARLY IRON AGE MONUMENTS
IN THE BTC AND SCP PIPELINE ROUTE:
ZAYAMCHAY AND TOVUZCHAY
NECROPOLEIS

The Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins, which are rich in archaeological monuments, are the geographical territories where Khojali-Gadabay archaeological culture is widespread. The scientific and historical importance of the late bronze and early iron age grave monuments of these basins is determined based on their originality and these basins' position among the neighboring regions. Rich artifacts found from the grave monuments dated to the late bronze and early iron age at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins show that the tribes and families living in this area were highly developed during this period of time. The materials discovered from the archeological excavations are primary and irreplaceable evidence for the investigation of the lifestyle, husbandry, craftsmanship, primitive religious beliefs, and other activity areas of the people that produced them.

The latest and most extensive phase of the archeological excavations conducted in Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins was related to the implementation of the BTC and SCP oil and gas pipeline route. Construction of these pipelines increased the economic strength and social welfare of the country and was a remarkable event with respect to the novelties brought to the archaeological science. Comprehensive investigation of the monuments discovered and excavated along the route of these pipelines has attained great scientific significance in the archaeology of Azerbaijan. Based on their size, the archeological excavations conducted in connection with the construction of the BTC and SCP pipelines transporting Azerbaijan's underground resources to the Mediterranean Sea via Georgia and Turkey are immeasurable investigations in comparison with the archeological investigations conducted in the republic over the last 40-50 years. The archeological excavations related to the construction of these pipelines and covering the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins increased the number of the basins' grave monuments and created opportunity for the discovery of new facts. The archeological team conducting the archeological excavations in the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis has discovered considerable grave monuments and collected interesting archeological evidence herein.

Certainly, the late bronze and early iron age monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins, concentrating a part of Azerbaijan's material culture in themselves, are the keepsakes of a rich historical period. These grave monuments, which are quite interesting for the investigation of our ethnic, economic, political, and moral history, also make it possible to consistently track the key processes that took place at the end of the common society. Investigation of the late bronze and early iron age grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins is rather topical and important for comprehensive scientific research of the relatively well-studied problematic issues related to the late bronze and early iron age of our history. Therefore, scientific interest related to the investigation of the late bronze and early iron age grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins, their type, time frame, and burial traditions, and the excavations of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis, has increased greatly. That is why today the theme of the investigations and the issues covered in this theme, which we are investigating, are deemed a very topical problem for archeologists, ethnographers, and other researchers.

Stone-covered and soil graves play a main role in investigations of the history and social structure of the ancient tribes and families living on this territory during the period in question. Both types of grave monuments are well-known from the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis. The graves of these necropoleis, which have a number of different local burial traditions, differ from Azerbaijan's grave monuments of similar age in terms of their type, structure, and character, but they do not differ with respect to the particularities of the archaeological materials.

A large group of stone-covered graves has been discovered in the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis.

The soil layer of the area of the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis consists of fine sand and saline soil mixed with clay and in some places simply gravel. In some places this soil is intersected by a 10-15 and even 20 cm thick petrified and hardened clay layer. Therefore, graves have been discovered at various depths up to 2.5 m. A surface feature of the graves at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis is the circular arrangement of medium-sized pebbles (15 x 25; 20 x 30) or their irregular placement on the ground surface.

The Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis are not multilayered. The placement of one grave over an older one is not encountered in these necropoleis.

The top stones of some stone-covered graves are completely visible but some of them are not seen. Their surface is covered with a soil layer of various thicknesses. However, there are some graves (soil graves) that do not have any top stones at all. It has also been observed that the grave soil in the middle of some graves – in the middle of the stones arranged in a circular pattern -- has sunk and formed a hollow.

The graves on the hill where the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis are located are arranged very densely at a close distance to one another. The distance among them varies between 2.20-0.50 cm.

Some graves do not have any chambers with clear boundaries. Therefore, we may divide these graves into two groups: graves with chambers and graves without chambers. In reality, all the graves had a specific chamber when they were arranged, i.e., when the deceased was buried he/she

was placed in different positions in the area allotted for him/her (in the chamber) together with the equipment, and stones and gravel-mixed soil were poured onto him/her. The difficulty related to tracing the boundaries of grave chambers is due to one factor – the soil of the necropolis. Accurate determination of the boundaries of the grave chamber dug in the natural gravel layer and covered with the same mixed gravel/soil is impossible. They were prepared in accordance with the same principle and then their surface and adjacent area were covered with pebbles, gravel, and sand-mixed soil in accordance with the territory occupied by them.

Some chamberless graves of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis have been robbed and destroyed. The boundaries of the grave chamber disappeared during the pillage, and its surface stone covers were rearranged in a rude and disorderly manner. However, such graves are not encountered frequently as those in the Zayamchay necropolis.

The graves robbed and plundered in their time were usually considered to be rich graves. Reputable, outstanding, and rich members of the tribe were buried luxuriously in these graves. Some of the chamberless graves of the necropolis are stone-covered graves and some are soil graves. And graves with partially or completely known chambers have been dug out in a relatively sandy place and their surface was covered with yellow, common, and sandy soil. This soil poured into the grave chamber differs sharply from the gravel layer of the adjacent area and this difference has not disappeared in the course of time. Therefore, it is possible to trace the accurate boundaries of the chamber of these graves.

Graves at both the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis have been discovered at various depths. It can be assumed that the difference between grave depths is connected with the features of the soil in a number of cases. However, considerable difference is also observed in the depths of the graves located very close to one another. Despite all these facts, it is possible to track a certain level in the grave depths. The overwhelming majority of the graves in the necropolis have been discovered at a depth of 0.50-1.20 m.

The deepest graves were discovered at a depth of 1.5-2 m. The surface of the hill containing the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis has been washed out by rain and meltwater during thousands of years, and consequently a number of graves have remained on the top layer of soil. Therefore, the cover layer consisting of pebbles reminiscent of the cover of the burial mound erected on the graves has collapsed and scattered around. However, one or more layers of pebbles placed on the earthenware in these graves have remained in place.

Some of the graves in the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis are poorly-equipped large-chambered graves, while some are richly-equipped small-chambered ones.

Both poorly-equipped and richly-equipped graves were encountered at Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis. Only 2, 3, or 4 clay dishes were discovered in the poorly-equipped graves and around 30 ceramic dishes and beads of various purpose and other trinkets and weapon specimens were found from the richly equipped graves. This inequality in equipment shows the role of social and economic stratification taking place in the society. The gradual appearance of a class society during this period of time was observed in the life of the ancient residents of the Tovuzchay basin as well. The observation of graves that differ sharply from one another in terms of

equipment, burial tradition, and structure in the same necropolis shows the existence of class stratification.

In a number of cases, the height of the grave equipment and pebbles arranged on the dead body reached 20-25 cm and over 1 m and commenced directly from the surface of the earth in the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis. There are cases of burial mound stones attached to one another according to type of burial mound. These pebbles are secured with black sand-mixed clayey mortar. It goes without saying that the pebbles used during the funeral have been brought from the nearby river valley. A heap of pebbles was encountered immediately in the central part of the necropoleis. Most likely, these stones have been gathered here as a reserve for the cover forming the surface layer of the graves. Taking into account that funerals occurred regularly at the necropolis, ancient people collected the spare stones herein. Similar spare grave stones were widely encountered at the Zayamchay necropolis.

Researchers write that similar graves with these peculiarities, and specifically with such pebble cover height, have not yet been encountered in Azerbaijan. Stone-covered graves of Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis are considered the grave types that have no counterparts in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus as a whole. The particularities of the graves at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis differ completely from the structure and features of the stone box and soil graves existing in Azerbaijan in the late bronze and early iron ages. The graves of the necropoleis differ from the stone boxes both in their structure and in the construction style. The fact is that these graves have neither the top and side rubble stones of the stone boxes nor the stone arrangement forming a concentric circle of the cromlech boxes. And from another standpoint, even the soil graves of the necropoleis have top covers consisting of similar sparse pebbles.

The other grave monuments of the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis are soil graves, and they also have top covers consisting of soil mixed with infrequent pebbles. These graves are not simple ones in terms of their structure. Small pebbles are observed in the top covers of the soil graves as well. These graves have also been dug out in the same gravelly and shingly soil of the necropoleis as the stone-covered graves. However, the surfaces of some of those graves are covered with fine sand and soil. Infrequent pebbles serving as surface covers are found on some of them.

Observation of both stone-covered and soil graves at the Tovuzchay and Zayamchay necropoleis is of great interest. There is no great difference among these types of graves from a chronological standpoint. The archeological materials discovered from the graves also support it. On the other hand, it goes without saying that the material (pebbles) required to make the stone cover has not been scanty because the nearby river valley has met this requirement completely. The idea that the graves with stone covers reminiscent of burial mound covers were constructed only in honor of well-to-do members of the tribe has also been supported. The rich equipment of some soil graves in comparison with stone-covered graves gives some doubt regarding the accuracy of this idea.

Arrangement of stone cover on the graves and placement of pebbles on some graves at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis has been related to the belief in stone in the funeral tradition. Investigations also indicate that the funeral tradition performed and the equipment found

in the graves do not differ irrespective of the types of the graves excavated and investigated at Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis.

Primarily tools used for different functions are included here. For example, we may show clay and stone dishes, bronze knives, needles, and awls, etc. There is no doubt that earthenware of different-size and form occupies the first place among the things used at home. The number and multiple types of earthenware are predominant among the archeological materials found in the late bronze and early iron age grave monuments of the Tovuzchay basin. Moreover, considerable weapon specimens (arrow and spear heads, lance heads, daggers) and trinkets were also discovered in the graves.

The earthenware items put into the graves were usually placed around the dead body. Sometimes ceramic specimens placed on one another are encountered as well. This has also been observed in some graves of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins. Perhaps the number of dishes put into the graves was dependent on the social and economic condition of the buried person when he/she was alive. In most cases, empty earthenware or earthenware filled with food remnants are encountered. This is undoubtedly associated with religious beliefs and views.

The earthenware samples found in the grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins are of different size and purpose, and they differ from one another in terms of their delicacy, originality, and decoration.

The results of the analysis conducted using carbon dating have assumed great scientific importance by the determination of the chronological period of the graves of Zayamchay (graves No. 8, 72, 75, 102, 117) and Tovuzchay necropoleis (graves No. 42, 45, 53, 56, 78). Carbon with 13/12 atomic weight and generated from the bone remnants found in the graves formed the basis of this method. Despite the fact that this analysis, which was conducted using the latest chemical and technical methods at Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory in Miami, Florida, in the USA, was carried out using the materials of only five graves of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis, they are sufficient for determining the chronological period of the graves at the necropolis.

It can be seen from the results of the radiocarbon analysis of the graves that funerals at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis were performed continuously during the fifth and sixth centuries. As can be seen from the table reflecting the results of the radiocarbon analyses, the beginning has been assumed as the 14th-15th centuries BC, and the last period – 9th century BC. We would also like to point out that, in distinction from the graves of Zayamchay necropolis, the graves of the Tovuzchay necropolis belong to the later period and cover the 9th-13th centuries BC. The graves of these necropoleis covering these centuries, on the basis of the archeological materials, are dated to the Khojali-Gadabay archeological culture's early, developed, and late periods.

The grave monuments dated to the end of the second millennium BC and the beginning of the first millennium BC are now the key sources for the investigation of the funeral traditions of the tribes and families that lived in Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basin.

Despite that, it was possible to determine the burial condition of skeletons and the direction of the skull in some graves, while it was impossible to do it in some other graves. The fact is that these skeletons were either in putrefied or decayed form.

Some of the skeletons in the necropolis have been buried on their right side and some other on their left side.

Based on this fact, we may suppose that the west-east directions prevail in the directions of the graves and skeletons discovered in the necropoleis. We mean that the sun was looking at the face of the dead body irrespective of the direction of the skull of the skeletons, with their heads to the west and feet to the east. Taking this fact as a basis, we may point out that not the overwhelming majority but some of the funerals in the necropolis have been related just to the movement of the sun in the sky and to other astral beliefs.

Religious beliefs have played an important role in the structure and construction materials of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins' late bronze and early iron age grave monuments. Burial of dead bodies in stretched, folded, semi-folded, and sometimes in seated form is closely connected with ethnic nationality, social factors, and funeral traditions. Civil inequality is clearly seen in the graves. We may also observe this difference even in the size of the grave chamber, in addition to its variegation. In each case, these graves and the particularities observed therein clearly reflect one cultural-ethnic development process.

The skeletons in some grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis are encountered in putrefied and decayed form.

Traces of the tradition of burying animals together with deceased persons have also been encountered in some grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis dated to the late bronze and early iron ages.

In general, belief in the other world was growing among the ancient people during the late bronze and early iron ages. It was also observed in the religious beliefs acquiring a stable and consistent form. People believed in the other world and fulfilled all the religious ceremonies related to it. The sky kingdom (the sun, the moon, stars), water, the forest (some trees, for example, juniper and pine trees were considered holy trees in the ancient periods), and various animals (horse, ox, snake, etc.) were worshipped during this period of time.

Stone-related religious ceremonies and funeral traditions occupy a major place in the grave monuments of the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis.

In addition to the aforementioned, we may show the placement of ordinary pebbles into some graves as another funeral tradition. Based on their equipment and form, these graves do not differ from graves where stones are not encountered. Differentiation of these graves from one another on the basis of their equipment and with respect to sex or stratum would not be correct.

One of the funeral traditions observed at the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis is the placement of pieces of obsidian stone into some graves.

A part of the funeral traditions of the ancient inhabitants of the western region of Azerbaijan, including the Zayamchay and Tovuzchay basins, is associated with astral beliefs. The astral beliefs are connected with ancient peoples' worship of the heavenly bodies – the sun, the moon, stars, etc.

The Zayamchay and Tovuzchay necropoleis' archeological materials covering all these interesting facts are of exceptional importance for the investigation of the late bronze and early iron age grave monuments of Azerbaijan.