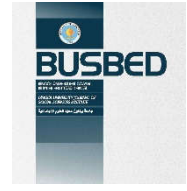


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THE PROBLEMATIQUE OF THE PEOPLES OF KURGAN CULTURE AND KURGAN-TYPE TOMBS EMERGED IN THE EARLY SECOND MILLENNIUM BC IN EASTERN ANATOLIA

Umut PARLITI¹, Ahmet KOCAİSPİR²

ABSTRACT

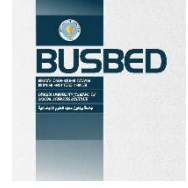
In the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, the tradition of burial mounds defined as kurgan tombs emerged on the frontiers of Transcaucasia and Northwest Iran, known as the plateaus of the Eastern Anatolia Region. Contrary to the emergence of these tombs, most of the settlements in the region vanished. Political motivations may be the reason for such a change, or as claimed, people may have left the plains and started animal husbandry due to climate instabilities. Accordingly, this paper seeks to bring together these views in a theoretical framework and discuss them in light of climate, people, environment, and migration.

Keywords: Eastern Anatolia Region, 2nd Millennium BC, Kurgan, Migration, Climate.

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DOĞU ANADOLU'DA MÖ 2. BİNYIL BAŞINDA ORTAYA ÇIKAN KURGAN MEZARLAR VE KURGAN HALKLAR SORUNSA LI

Umut PARLITI¹, Ahmet KOCAİSPİR²

ÖZ

MÖ 2. Binyıl başlarında Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nin yüksek yaylaları olarak tabir edebileceğimiz Transkafkasya ve Kuzeybatı İran sınırlarımızda kurgan olarak tanımlanan yığma mezar geleneği ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu mezarların ortaya çıkış süreciyle paralel yerleşimlerin çoğu son bulmuştur. Böylesi bir yeniliğin sebepleri arasında politik nedenler ön görüldüğü gibi iklimsel dalgalanmalar sonucu halkların düzlükleri terkederek hayvancılığa başladığı da iddia edilmektedir. Biz bu makalede teorik çatıda görüşleri bir araya getirdikten sonra çıkan sonuçları iklim, insan, çevre, göç ekseninde okuyucuyla paylaşıyoruz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi, MÖ 2. Binyıl, Kurgan, Göç, İklim.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Initial observations of humans in nature facilitated their survival and adaption to the environment they inhabited, thus laying the foundation for the earliest scientific approaches on earth. These observations paved the way for certain practices to emerge dating back to the Paleolithic Age (Tiryaki, 2017: 2455-2456). One of them is the phenomenon of death which can be defined as an occurrence when a living thing completely loses its vital functions. From the onset of human history, people mourned their dead and then built monumental tombs as a sign of reverence. New forms of burial techniques like monumental kurgan tombs emerged in this process offering insight into the political and religious life of the dead (Aydın Tavukçu & Avli, 2021: 68-69). Neanderthals are the earliest humans to mourn their dead and start the burial tradition for them. They continued to develop burial customs and passed them down to the next generations (Yücel, 2021: 1; Parliti et al., 2021: 626). In parallel with the development of tombs, kurgans, which were dedicated to the elites containing rich burial items, started to be built in the 3rd Millennium BC (Parliti & Yücel, 2020: 223, 225). In fact, the word kurgan means “to protect” as a term. Protection measures were applied by piling large, circular soil and stones on the chambers of these tombs (Yücel, 2017: 162).

It is asserted that this tomb type, which was seen in Eastern Anatolia at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, was influenced by the Caucasian kurgan burial culture (Sagona & Zimansky, 2009: 190; Kocaispir & Yücel, 2022: 98). Once appeared in Central Asia in the Chalcolithic Age (5th Millennium BC) it started to evolve in the westward direction, and later (4th Millennium BC), it was practiced in the Caucasus. During the Early Bronze Age (EBA), it was encountered not only in Eastern Anatolia but also in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, northwestern Iran, and the Syro-Levantine region (Yardımcıel, 2015: 42-43).

Ancestors of the people who adopted the kurgan-type burial customs had interregional migration flows between Eastern Anatolia and Transcaucasia. This migration movement may have been continuous rather than as intermittent influxes. It is seen that these people, who experienced the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age culture in this region, had a nomadic lifestyle favoring the concepts such as tribe and chieftom as a social status in their community (Kocaispir & Yücel, 2022: 102). In this early period, the peoples of both regions began to live together peacefully. At the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age –the late phase of this process– peoples of certain kurgan-type tomb cultures with rich burial goods settled in the region. They mostly lived around Muş-Van in the south of the expanse while the successive communities of the Kura-Araxes culture lived around Erzurum-Kars in the north of the region (Işıklı, 2010: 28).

2. KURGAN PEOPLES, MIGRATION AND CLIMATE-ENVIRONMENT THEORY

The Eastern Anatolian region has always been a dynamic transition zone for different communities ranging from people of the Kura-Araxes culture to people of the Kurgan culture. Since it is in the position of a bridge, it is a frequent destination for nomadic groups. It is claimed that nomadic communities moved between Transcaucasia and Eastern Anatolia for at least three generations. This claim is supported by three common progressive social dynamics between Eastern Anatolia and Transcaucasia. It is argued that as a result of the migration movements of the Kurgan peoples, which is the last of these, the settled life in the Upper Murat-Van territory was interrupted to a large extent.

It is also stated that this way of life has been replaced by ovine breeding and a pastoralist or semi-pastoralist lifestyle. It is possible to trace the most distinctive marks of these people in burial goods of the monumental Kurgan-type tombs, which started from the northern part of the Lake Van Basin and spread to the interior of Transcaucasia (Sevin, 2004: 356).

Another view contends that the kurgan burial culture with painted pottery may have emerged in the eastern half of Eastern Anatolia as a result of unprecedented migration dynamics. It is thought that these pastoral communities living in the mountainous terrains along the Eastern Anatolia-Transcaucasia borders at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC initially lived with peasant and farmer communities who were engaged in agriculture in the same area. It is thought that they emerged in the Eastern Anatolia Region with this process since the kurgan burial traditions are likened to the Trialeti kurgan tombs of Georgia. The kurgan-type tombs that appeared at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC have been defined as a kind of symbol of the advanced hierarchical order (Özfirat, 2001: 1).

The theory that attributes the decline in the number of settlements throughout the Eastern Anatolia Region at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC to this nomadic lifestyle has still not been resolved today. In these discussions, the archeological science is mostly based on the fact that at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC, nomadic peoples may have infiltrated Eastern Anatolia and assimilated the local people, and the communities turned to a new ethnocultural lifestyle. Moreover, political change is explained by the kurgan tombs, which is a new burial tradition, and the painted ceramics unearthed inside them (Özfirat, 2006a: 165, 169). Another strong

evidence in this regard is presented as the fact that these groups lived on the rocks on the outskirts of high mountains and built fortresses to form a defensive line (Özfiat, 2007: 14). Theories about the nomadic way of living are supported as a foreseeable result of the economic and cultural transformations that occurred between Eastern Anatolia and Transcaucasia in the 2nd Millennium BC (Özfiat, 2005: 139).

Climate-human and environmental change model is also put forward for this new lifestyle. There are researchers who attribute the main reason for the Kurgan peoples leading a nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle to climate and geographical conditions (Sevin, 2004: 357). People who are representatives of the Kurgan tradition are associated with communities that adapt to seasonal changes in different climates and vegetation at varying altitudes (Erinç, 1993: 8). There is also scientific evidence that supports the base of all these theories. Pollen analyses taken from the Lake Van Basin, one of the regions where the kurgans are located, and studies on water flow confirm that there was a great drought/aridity between 2200-1900 BC. Especially the destruction of forests to a large extent is also attributed to human activities along with this drought. This period of time in which the humidity decreases, deforestation rises and water scarcity begins, coincides with the periods when the communities of Eastern Anatolia experienced the political, social, and economic change (Kuzucuoğlu, 2007: 461-470).

This new dynamic transformation that took place in Eastern Anatolia also manifests itself in local settlements and kurgans around Transcaucasia's Javakheti Plateau and Lake Paravani (Georgia). Archaeological records show that the settlers here desisted agricultural motivations and switched to a pastoral lifestyle (Messenger et al., 2013: 137-138, Fig. 7). In the period of Trialeti culture, which is representative of this process, mountain foothills were densely populated, where there were favorable conditions for cattle breeding and mostly for agriculture. Therefore, while mountain valleys such as Tsalka, Zurtaketi, Body, and Niala were highly developed, the Javakheti plateau remained uninhabited due to climatic conditions, especially as it was not very suitable for agriculture. The massive destruction of forest areas created promising circumstances for cattle breeding, which played an important role in the economy in this era. Cattle breeding with seasonal grazing on summer and winter pastures became widespread in this period. During this period, possibly all conditions were suitable for ovine breeding in Eastern Transcaucasia. For summer pastures, while high mountain valleys like Trialeti, Meskheti, and Javakheti were widely preferred, the main base for winter grazing must have been primarily the Kvemo-Kartli plain. The growth of sheep breeding, which provides more surplus products in relation to climate and environment, has contributed to the consolidation of property inequality in the community (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 72).

During the course of history, where settlements were largely desolate in the regions from Transcaucasia to Eastern Anatolia (Özdemir et al., 2013: 972-973), powerful states in the Near East were destroyed one by one. The collapse of the Akkadian Empire –the most noteworthy of these around 2200 BC– was attributed to the arid climate (Nicoll & Küçükuysal, 2013: 134). After the downfall of the Akkadian Empire, only 300 years later, resettlement began with small-scale populations in Mesopotamia (Cullen et al., 2000: 379-380, 382, Fig. 2-3). In this process, the continuation of the settled life in the Upper Euphrates Basin differs from other regions. The dry weather conditions experienced in the highlands of Eastern Anatolia were also influential in the Euphrates and Tigris Basins. We understand that numerous changes took place in the adverse conditions of the climate-environment cycle as a result of the fluctuation of floods in the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and the arid areas which were previously fertile (Issar & Zohar, 2007: 128). However, settled life continued in the Euphrates Basin due to the high humidity provided by the water resources throughout the valley. Other places witnessed the social collapse because of the water shortages and low humidity. Therefore, people must have migrated to more convenient areas in groups. So, with this significant transformation, there have been changes in agricultural production and preferences of agricultural product types in most parts of the Near East along with the transition from the Early Bronze Age to the Middle Bronze Age (Riehl et al., 2014: 12348, Fig. 12-16).

The extraordinary barren climate conditions, which had been dominant in Eastern Anatolia and the surrounding regions, brought the end of civilizations in 200-300 years. The adverse weather circumstances and deteriorating environmental and social imbalances must have occurred too unprecedentedly for political systems to cope with (Roberts et al., 2011: 152, Fig. 5). Because the settlements in most parts of Eastern Anatolia were abandoned and the prevailing states in the neighboring areas disappeared from the stage of history. Thus, we can affirm that due to the political vacuum and the continuation of the undesirable condition in the climate, the settlers migrated to more consistent places and to the higher parts where the climate was more suitable. In fact, some of these people changed their lifestyles completely and turned to nomadism.

3. KURGANS OF THE EASTERN ANATOLIA REGION DATED TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 2ND MILLENNIUM BC

The period when kurgan-type burial practices were beginning to be observed in the Eastern Anatolia Region, also refers to the significant changes experienced in the climate, vegetation, and social life of the region. Therefore, our study covers key kurgan tombs, which are dated to the earliest period. The first of these is the Kuzeyhan Fortress Tomb, located on the Caucasus passages, 4 km from the Dağpınar town of the Digor district of Kars province. The

tomb is 500 m. away from Kuzeyhan Fortress, which is 5 km from Karakale village (Yardımcıel, 2015: 43, 46, Levha.7). 14 kurgan-type tombs were discovered in this cemetery, which is located on flat terrain in a high area. The largest of the identified kurgans is 4.30 m in diameter, while the smallest is 1.20 m. The dimensions of the tombs vary between 4 and 1 m (Bingöl, 2016a: 133, Pic. 7). The only similar example of this tomb, which is typologically comparable to the Bozkurt Kurgans, was found in the Selim district of Kars (Yardımcıel, 2015: 43, 46, Levha. 8). Another kurgan-type tomb in Kars province is Ziyarettepe. The tomb positioned on the 35th km of Kars-Ani highway spreads over the southern skirt of the Ziyarettepe Fortress and its environs (Bingöl, 2016b: 494-495). The cromlech kurgan tombs found here are associated with the Middle Bronze Age kurgans that started to appear in the South Caucasus (Bingöl, 2016c: 291, Lev.4).

Another place where Kurgan-type tomb culture has been practiced is Ardahan. Kurtkale Kurgans are located just to the left of the Kura River bordering Georgia, and it is 35 km north of the town of Çıldır, 1 km east of Kurtkale village (Patacı, 2015: 74). Several plundered burial chambers and circular stone rows surrounding the cover of the tomb were found in this area (Patacı, 2015: 74). The dimensions of the burial chamber of the first kurgan are 1.70x3.70x1.60 m, and the second one is 1.70x3.50x2 m. The diameter of the circular boundary stones of the kurgan varies between 7 and 11 m (Köroğlu, 1997: 377, Pic. 10, Illus. 4,5; Patacı, 2015: 74). Akçakale Kurgan, which was identified within the borders of Ardahan, is located in Çıldır district, 18 km. southeast and 500 m in the west of Akçakale village (Edens, 2003: 73). The east-west oriented burial chamber of this kurgan measures 6.50x3.50 m (Edens, 2003: 74, Pic. 5, Illus. 1,2; Patacı, 2015: 74). In the middle of the chamber, there is a stone column measuring 3.13x2x0.15-70 m –the one on the ceiling is north-south oriented–. It is indicated that the cover of the tomb was made of flattened stones superimposed on this beam in the middle from the east and west. A large *in situ* lintel with 2.66x0.70x0.40 m dimensions above the door of the burial chamber has survived to the present day. Considering the direction of the kurgan and the construction technique of the sidewalls, it is stated that it has similarities with the Kurtkale kurgans (Köroğlu, 1997: 379, Pic: 14, Illus. 6-7). Another kurgan tomb dated to the 2nd Millennium BC within the provincial borders of Ardahan is Cinnik. Cinnik kurgans are located 3 km east of Çıldır Village. Along with human skeletons, horse and dog skeletons were found in these kurgans (Karageçi & Özgül, 2019: 808).

Another region where early-dated kurgan tombs are discovered is Iğdır. The Tuzluca Hasankent, situated in Hasankent village of Tuzluca district, can be dated to the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC (2300-2000 BC), when compared with other kurgans in terms of architectural characteristics.

This kurgan is 9 m. in height and 34 m. in diameter (Özfirat, 2006b: 186, Fig. 10; Yardımcıel, 2015: 43, 45, Levha. 5). Another kurgan is the Hazineteppe Fortress Kurgan which is one of the earliest ones positioned on a high rocky hill in the north of Orta Damla village, 38 km away from Erciş district of Van province (Özfirat, 2009a, 457). Yuvadamlı Kurgan Tomb is situated on the shore of Lake Van in Yuvadamlı/Ersonk village of Ahlat District of Bitlis province (Özfirat, 1994: 360). There are tombs dated to the Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, and Iron Ages in the burial site (Özfirat, 2001a: 80, Pic. 37.) Depending on the evaluations carried out in the tomb, there are rectangular planned stone cists and chamber tombs carved into the soft rock. It has been stated that these are actually kurgan-type tombs because of the low piles on them. The terracotta pottery remaining from the raids of the tombs contains painted and unpainted pottery types dating to the 2nd Millennium BC (Özfirat, 2001b: 328).

Suluçem/Musun Kurgan Tomb in the Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı province, which is one of the sites where kurgan-type ceramics were found, is located on the southern slope of Mount Eleşkirt, in the valley of Balık Gölü across from Mount Ağrı (Özfirat & Marro, 2005: 302; Özfirat, 2010a: 527; Tiryaki, 2018: 641; Yardımcıel et al., 2018: 76). There are at least 6 main kurgan tombs made of piles of stones here (Özfirat, 2010a: 527). Monochrome painted and black polished ceramic sherds around the kurgans indicate that they belong to the transition phase to the Middle Bronze Age. There are up to 9 small kurgans measuring 5-6 m in diameter around one of the main kurgans made of stone and earth. Multiple burials must have been implemented in the kurgans destroyed by illegal excavations (Özfirat, 2001c: 31, Abb.3). Bozkurt, another kurgan tomb, is located in the north of Bozkurt (formerly Kurtkapan) village, 16 km from Doğubayazıt district of Ağrı province (Özfirat & Coşkun, 2014: 146).

A total of 18 kurgans have been unearthed in this cemetery, and about thirty-four kurgans have been identified (Özfirat, 2012a: 534, Illus. 1). The base diameter of these tombs is between 7 m and 18 m, and its height is between 0.60 m and 4 meters, its burial pit is between 0.80 m and 2.10 m, and the bottom diameter varies between 0.80 and 3.5 m. The tops of these kurgans were made of untreated stones. Stonemasonry or stone cists were built under these stones stacked on each other. Tombs are rectangular in plan and oriented east-west with a dimension of 1.20x0.60 m. Terracotta pots and animal bones (Özfirat, 2009b: 637, Illus. 3, Kurgan 1; Özfirat, 2009c: 370; Özfirat, 2014: 320) were found near human skeletons in the tombs. These kurgans, which were heavily destroyed as a result of illegal excavations and spread over an area of 12 km², started to be implemented around 2.300/2.200 BC (Özfirat, 2010b: 42; Özfirat, 2014: 211).

4. THE BEGINNING OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IN EASTERN ANATOLIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF KURGAN TOMBS

As of the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, animal husbandry activities carried out in herds in the grasslands, mountain foothills and plains of Eastern Anatolia affected all traditions from the birth of people to their death. The most noticeable of these is the emergence of the kurgan-type burial tradition. Although the dating of these tombs is not certain, the discovery of Middle Bronze Age ceramics reflecting the relations with the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran is an indication (Özfiat, 2014: 26). We know that these kurgan burials, which were discovered in the eastern half of Eastern Anatolia at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, were applied in high hills and mountainous areas. However, it would be more accurate to explain the implementation of this tradition not with land conservation, but with cultural dynamics based on nomadic life stemming from climate-environmental constituents. The kurgan-type tombs accumulating on the eastern border of Eastern Anatolia suggest that there was stronger communication with Transcaucasia compared to the west of this region. It is possible to attribute the absence of kurgan-type tombs in the Upper Euphrates Basin at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC to the continuation of settled life in this area and to the establishment of communication with Mesopotamia again. Nevertheless, communication was mostly maintained with the Transcaucasia region in the eastern half of Eastern Anatolia where harsh climatic conditions prevailed, and the kurgan burial tradition and new social structure were seen.

When we consider the relationship in terms of dimensions, parallelism has been established between the kurgan tombs, especially the Kurtkale and Akçakale Kurgans. These two kurgan tombs can be associated with the Trialeti and Meskheta Kurgans, which are geographically close (Köroğlu, 1997: 377, Res. 10, Çiz. 4,5; Özfiat, 2003: 345, Pic. 4; Patacı, 2015:74). Another kurgan tomb, which is said to have similar characteristics to Meskheta kurgans, is Cinnik (Karageçi & Özgül, 2019: 808). Except for Cinnik, which is located in the Upper Murat-Van Section, the Hazinetepe, Yuvadamlı, Suluçem, Dorukdibi, and Bozkurt Kurgans reveal that they are amassed on the margins of Transcaucasia and the western border of the Eastern Anatolia Region (Tiryaki, 2018: 641-642)

Close similarities can be seen between South Caucasus and Iranian Azerbaijan in terms of settlement system, pottery, and finds from Bozkurt Kurgan and other settlements in Ağrı (Özfiat, 2012b: 114). Yuvadamlı cemetery with kurgan-type tombs can be compared with Trialeti in Georgia, Berkinagızı in Azerbaijan Kazakh region, Zurnabad in Khanlar region, and Ezneburd tombs in Nakhchivan (Özfiat, 1994: 361-362, Pic: 5-6, Illus. 2). In this case, it is understood that they expand along a line that can be drawn between Muş-Erzurum in the west and the area bordered by Tendürek and Aladağlar in the south. It is stated that there are fewer such burial traditions in the Çaldıran-Erciş-Patnos region, located in the south of Tendürek and Aladağlar and the north of the Lake Van Basin. Besides, it is asserted that there is no such burial tradition except for a few examples found in the Lake Van Basin (Özfiat, 2009b: 635-636).

As we briefly discussed above, it is possible to look for the origin of the kurgan-type tomb tradition encountered in the Eastern Anatolian Region in the kurgan-type tombs dated to the Early Bronze Age of Transcaucasia. According to a study, kurgan tombs, reflecting the ramifications of the migration flows, reached Transcaucasia and then Eastern Anatolia from the Eurasian steppes (Özfiat, 2003: 350). The distribution area of the kurgan-type tombs, which is a distinctive indicator of this culture with tangible remains in the Eastern Anatolia Region cannot be determined clearly as it is an extension and continuation of Transcaucasia. However, it is possible to associate the common manifestations of this new culture, which occupies a large place in Eastern Anatolia after the Transcaucasian region, with the communication sustained through the deep valleys (Köroğlu, 1997: 371).

4.1. Trialeti Culture and Kurgan Tombs

Since the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, significant changes have occurred in the Transcaucasia region. Basically, the further growth of the economy accelerated the development of metallurgy and distinct craftsmanship. In addition, certain transformations were experienced in economic and social life thanks to the strengthening of ethnocultural contacts with the Ancient East world. This constructive atmosphere has contributed to the cultural complexity in general and has led to the transformation of cultures. This situation has become one of the reasons for the decline of the sophisticated and strong Kura-Araxes culture, which was dominant in the region. The settlements of the Kura-Araxes culture were abandoned, life was lost on the plains, and the human population shifted to the foothills of the mountains. With the disappearance of the effect of Kura-Araxes culture in the region, a new culture called Trialeti Culture emerged in East Georgia and adjacent regions (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 62).

Trialeti Culture was discovered for the first time in the high mountainous part of Southern Georgia - Trialeti, thanks to archaeological excavations that started in 1936, and shed new light on the ancient past of Transcaucasia (Kuftin, 1941: 78-105; Blek, 1973: 282; Narimanishvili, 2002: 197). In the late 1950s, new steps were taken in the study of Trialeti culture. Research has led to the discovery of several interesting settlements in eastern Georgia

and beyond its borders. This discovery revealed that the Trialeti tribes spread extensively in Eastern Transcaucasia (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 62).

In a sizeable region that encompasses a part of the Eastern Anatolia Region, the burial tradition with the Trialeti Culture has altered prominently. With this culture, individual kurgan tombs, sometimes reaching large sizes, emerged. These kurgans can be evaluated in two different periods. The first of these is early kurgans dated to the second half and end of the 3rd millennium BC. The latter is represented by the kurgan burial tradition, which covers the entire first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Kushnareva, 1983: 11-12; Kushnareva, 1997: 18-19). When we look at the artifacts obtained from the early period kurgans, it can be clearly seen that there is a genetic relationship with the Kura-Araxes culture that spread in the region before it. The similarities are evident in the pottery that preserves some of the characteristics of Kura-Araxes ceramics. Apart from that, similarities are also apparent in metal objects (Blek, 1973: 282; Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 63; Kushnareva, 1997: 20-21).

During this period, interactions with the southern regions became more frequent, which led to a significant expansion in the level of general culture. The advances of the people in individual handicrafts, metallurgy, and pottery are particularly noteworthy (Abramishvili, 2006: 167). Besides, precious pieces of jewelry also appeared in this period. When we look at the burial goods obtained from the kurgans, it is understood that the works made of precious metals were relatively simple in the early period, and then artistic products with highly skilled craftsmanship were produced. The first thing that catches the eye in the kurgan tombs of this culture is the black burnished, polished ceramics, and among these, the pear-shaped, large single-handled vessels outweigh (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 63). Despite some differences, we can say that this pottery group is in a genetic relationship and continuity with the previous Kura-Araxes pottery. Thanks to the highly skilled local craftsmen of this period, metal weapons can be distinguished in their original form. Artifacts such as beads, rings, etc. made of precious metals were found in Martkopi kurgans (Djaparitze, 1994: 77). The application technique of the jewelry pieces is quite extraordinary. In addition, grave goods like various beads made of agate stones, pendants made of animal teeth, etc. were uncovered in these kurgans (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 63).

The earliest kurgan group belonging to the Early Trialeti Culture is known from Trialeti, Martkopi, and Samgori near Tbilisi (Kushnareva, 1997: 18-19). These kurgans have a very complex structure. The Samgori and Martkopi kurgans are covered with earth and stones inside. It is also seen that these kurgans reach quite large sizes in some cases. Of these, the “*Martkopi Kurgan*” is 12 m high and over 100 m in diameter (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 63). There is a burial chamber under the stone pile in the center of this kurgan. The burial chamber was firmly fixed to the corners and was formed as a result of interlocking large tree trunks. The outer dimensions of the chamber are 11.0X10.0 m, and the interior is 8.0X6.0 m with 2.0 m in height (Djaparitze, 1994: 75).

The kurgans of the late phase of the early period are better presented and are associated with the Bedeni Culture. Kurgans belonging to this period have been identified in Trialeti, Tsalka, and Bedeni plateaus (Djaparitze, 1964: 103). The kurgans found in the Tsalka plateau mainly contain ceramic vessels. Along with silver pendants and rings, a gold two-headed pin was found in one of the kurgans. In the other kurgan, along with metal weapons, three cylindrical artifacts made of a thin gold plate were found (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 64).

An even more vivid picture of the complex process that took place at the end of the 3rd millennium BC is provided by the kurgans found on the high plateau of Bedeni. Most of these kurgans are relatively small. Except for one, all Bedeni kurgans are pit-shaped, sometimes rectangular chambers made of vertically arranged trees. The adobe floors are covered with felt, wicker, or animal skin, and in some cases, a four-wheeled wooden carriage was placed in the burial pit (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 64).

Among these kurgans, a rectangular structure stands out in the “*Bedeni Kurgan*”, which is particularly striking. The floor and ceiling of the building are mainly made of tree logs supported by two wooden beams. There is a bed and a four-wheeled cart in the middle of this structure. Again, in this section, poorly preserved bones of the owner of this kurgan were found. In the northeastern part of the kurgan, there are two more skeletons, possibly belonging to a woman and a young man, with strongly bent legs, to accompany the deceased. Apart from these, large quantities of food such as wheat, chestnuts, nuts, forest fruits, animal bones, wool, linen, felt and plenty of earthenware and wooden utensils were placed in the kurgan (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 64). Although the kurgan was looted, various metal items made of gold, silver, and copper were found. Besides, arrowheads made of obsidian and flint are noteworthy. Arrowheads of this type were found in significant numbers in a kurgan near Tetri-Tskaro and the large Alazani kurgan. Clay pots recovered from the small-sized kurgans of Kvemo-Kartli, located in the lower reaches of the Marneuli valley, are strongly reminiscent of Bedeni ceramics (Djaparitze, 1994: 77-79).

During the Bedeni Culture period, the Alazani Valley in Kakheti was densely populated. Among the kurgans of this period, two large kurgans near Tsnori and one in Bakursih village are notable. The largest of these kurgans is 11.0 m high and 160 m in diameter. In the middle of the kurgan tomb, under the pile of stones, there is a round foundation made of cobblestones. There is a large burial pit to the east of the kurgan. In the pit, there is a rectangular

structure made of vertically placed wooden trunks covered with logs in double rows. There is a second, relatively smaller kurgan tomb, covered with logs in double rows, with a rectangular pit in the middle. The bottom of this burial pit is covered with straw. In addition, more than five human skeletons were found in the large kurgan and two human skeletons in the small kurgan. A four-wheeled chariot was found in the middle of the small kurgan. The grave goods of both kurgans are very valuable. In addition to a large number of potteries, many grave goods such as silver, gold, bronze items and obsidian arrowheads, etc. were discovered (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 64-65; Djaparitze, 1994: 79; Parlı & Yücel, 2019: 924-925, Fig. 6a).

Other tombs associated with the kurgan tombs in eastern Anatolia are Meskheti kurgans. These kurgan tombs in Meskheti in Southern Georgia are also associated with the Trialeti culture, and we can say that they are the representatives of this culture at its pinnacle. These Bronze Age kurgan burials are mainly amassed in the terraces and high mountain valleys of the Artaan Kura basin. There is a burial chamber in the middle of all Meskheti kurgans. The room with the dromos has a solid corridor, usually oriented from east to west, and divided by a transverse wall of large boulders. The walls of the chambers were built with piled-up large stones (Djaparitze, 1994: 81; Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 66-67).

In almost all kurgans, there are skeletons, mostly with their legs bent, next to the elite person. In one of the kurgans, near the back wall of the burial chamber, a wooden four-wheeled chariot was found, reflecting the burial technique. Of the animal bones found in the kurgans, the remains of cattle outweigh (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 66-67).

Although most of the Meskheti kurgans were looted, the presence of numerous burial goods proves that it was a prominent hub of Trialeti culture. The majority of the burial items are black burnished polished vessels on a clear or pink slip. Among the grave goods found in the large-sized kurgans, there are mainly large vessels decorated with carved patterns or molded items, defined as the ceramics of the Trialeti kurgans. The ceramics found in the small kurgans, on the other hand, consist mostly of kitchen utensils, unlike the Trialeti (Djaparitze, 1994: 81). These ceramics still preserve some of the characteristics of Kura-Araxes ceramics. Interestingly, metal inventory is scarce in Meskheti kurgans. Only a few bronze daggers, a fluted spear, and bronze pins and needles were recovered. Apart from these, there is a large golden bead decorated with a relief technique among the metal clouds found in the kurgan (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 66-67).

In the Kartalinskaya valley, near Metekhi and Grakali, kurgan tombs dating to the Middle Bronze Age were identified. Two kurgan tombs, the burial rites of which differed greatly from ordinary earthen burials, were unearthed in the Samtavr kurgan in the city of Mtskheta. Among the burial goods were large vessels, gold necklaces and beads resembling Trialeti artifacts, bronze daggers, and a long sword (Djaparitze, 1994: 88). A similar sword was found in the Lilo kurgan not far from Tbilisi. Along with black burnished polished ceramics typical of the Trialeti Culture, grave goods such as flat dagger blades, necklaces, gold beads, etc. were discovered (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 67-68).

Another kurgan tomb is in the Iori river basin, on the Saduga road, containing a wealth of grave goods. Under the top layer covered with stones, there is a large burial chamber with several small and large cattle bones, more than thirty clay vessels, a small bronze cauldron, and various items made of precious metals (Djaparitze, 1994: 88). Also, a bronze sword unique to the Trialeti culture is among the important finds recovered in the kurgan (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 68).

Unlike others, the tradition of cremation has been identified in the Saduga kurgan. Judging by the materials recovered from the kurgan, it seems likely that this kurgan tomb belonged mainly to the upper class of Trialeti society. Apparently, the tradition of cremation in Transcaucasia came from Asia Minor, known from a fairly early period. In connection with the burial customs of the Trialeti kurgans, it has been suggested that it resembles the burial ritual of the kings mentioned in the Hittite texts and that there is a Hurrian influence in the cremation tradition of the Hittite and the Trialeti society (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 68). When we look at the kurgan tombs of this period in general, the four-wheeled carriages seen in the designs of the kurgans in the Trialeti culture from the early period maintained their existence in this period (Djaparitze, 1994: 89). They were probably not designed for practical use and still existed as burial items. This tradition must have penetrated Transcaucasia from the south because tombs with four-wheeled chariots pulled by bulls are known from the 3rd millennium BC (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 68).

Another region where we can look for parallels with the kurgan tombs of Eastern Anatolia dating to the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC is Armenia. Among them, the Kirovakan Kurgan is a large tomb (area 30 m²) 3 m deep, under a wooded embankment. It is thought that the wooden carriage standing in the middle of the tomb served as a container for the ashes of the cremated person. The skull and limbs thought to belong to a bull were found in the corners of the tomb. In the burial chamber, there are painted and black burnished “ewers” decorated with ribbon-shaped ornaments and scraping techniques (Blek, 1973: 287). Metal items are represented by items not found in other complexes. These include a copper spearhead, an axe, a copper cauldron, and three bronze daggers. The

deceased was accompanied by exquisitely crafted jewelry items. These include a golden bowl with a lion figure, a hemispherical silver bowl, silver goblets, a bucket, and beads made of gold (Kushnareva, 1994: 93).

Karaşamb Kurgan, on the other hand, is in the form of a kurgan-type tomb covered with stones. Under this stone layer, there is an area with 7x4 m dimensions, surrounded by stones and sheltered with logs. The kurgan tomb contains the cremated remains of the deceased, many sacrificial animals, and a wealth of gifts from the dead, including weapons, symbols of power, jewelry, utensils, and unique items made of precious metals (Kushnareva, 1994: 98; Abramishvili, 2006: 172).

Aruch kurgans have large kurgan tombs with a diameter of 30 m with huge chambers underneath. The chamber of Kurgan 2 carved in tuff measures 5.1 x 3.0 m. There is a vertical entrance on the east wall. The remains of a fire pit were found in the tomb (Kushnareva, 1993: 90). Over 40 black burnished, polished, and painted vessels were discovered in one of the surveyed kurgans. Slotted spearheads, bronze two-handled cauldrons, obsidian arrowheads, and gold jewelry were found in the kurgans. Among the black burnished polished and painted wares are probably imported thin-walled, lightly slipped vessels (Kushnareva, 1994: 98).

Maisyán Kurgans are located on the lower terrace surrounding the Ararat valley. Here, under the kurgans, there are large burial chambers with dromos. The deceased was buried with cremation and bull sacrifices. A wooden carriage was found in kurgan 7 here. Comb-stamped black burnished polished pottery stands out as grave finds. Among the metal items are bronze daggers, a bronze sword found in the kurgan (Kushnareva, 1994: 98).

The kurgan tombs in Transcaucasia, which are associated with Eastern Anatolia, have complex burial rites, rich grave goods, and the existence of huge kurgan tombs, which require a great deal of effort to build, attest to the significant changes that took place in social relations. The increasing needs of the economically stronger class in the society have given a considerable impetus to new creative pursuits and the growth of various crafts. All these artifacts from the early kurgan burials indicate a general growth in the welfare of the society at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 64-65). Considering the burial artifacts found in the kurgan tombs of this period, it is proved that the Trialeti Culture had an important rise in the art of jewelry in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. Products made of precious metals are notable for their high craftsmanship and perfect form (Djaparitze, 1994: 90-91). They bear witness to the sophisticated art of masters who laid the foundations of Georgia's current jewelry art tradition. In the elaboration process of jewelry, a unique style has been gradually developed, namely, the use of inlay together with granulation, punch and filigree gave Trialeti products originality. Gold and silver items are distinguished by their diversity, complexity and high level of metalworking technology. The most common of the precious jewelry are large spherical, hollow beads decorated with granulation, spherical gold-headed needles inlaid with colored stones, distinguished by high manufacturing technique. A spherical bead necklace decorated with jewels, gold, agate and additional stones is striking (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 69). Among the gifts of the dead found in the tombs, gold and silver vessels-cups, bowls, and buckets are particularly noticeable. Smooth-walled silver and gold bowls shaped in a rotating machine impress with their elegant form (Djaparitze, 1994: 90-91). In terms of the complexity of the embroidery and the use of artistic possibilities, a subtle golden goblet should be particularly noted. The outer face of the goblet is framed with twisted wire and decorated with colored round stones. This goblet is unique compared to other works of the Near East (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 69-71).

5. GENERAL EVALUATIONS AND CONCLUSION

We know that the kurgan tombs unearthed in the eastern half of Eastern Anatolia were built in the highlands called plateaus. In this study, this tradition should be associated with the nomadic lifestyle rather than land conservation. Contrary to what is said, it would not be correct to associate this type of burial tradition, which has been practiced in the Eastern Anatolia Region since the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC, with elite people. Every individual who died was interred in such monumental tombs since it became a part of the life of the people living on livestock. Such a burial practice should be seen as a kind of regional sign, a symbol of claiming land and demonstrating the dominance over grazing lands. These people built such tomb structures to leave a symbolic mark and signpost the places of their ancestors. The aim here must be to prevent the loss of physical connection with the past by ensuring family/ancestry unity (ancestral cult) and to maintain the continuity of a strong position against other lineages in their region. In a way, families were drawing their property boundaries through monumental tombs.

However, the kurgan tombs in Transcaucasia, the contemporary of Eastern Anatolia, give the impression of a quite different social and economic structure. The golden age for the Trialeti culture here coincides with the first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Kushnareva, 1983: 12; Kushnareva, 1997: 20-21). The further development of local traditions and the strengthening of relations with the outside world must have contributed significantly to the rise of this culture. During this period, critical changes occurred in the social structure of the society. The kurgan tombs of this period reveal that the Trialeti society entered a comprehensive stratification process, and a very strong tribal aristocracy began to emerge. The tombs clearly reflect the establishment of hierarchical relations in which the elite class apparently reaches a dominant position in society. For instance, the kurgan tombs in the high mountainous

part of Trialeti, on the Tsalka and Zurtaketi plateaus (Djaparitze, 1964: 110-113; Djaparitze, 1994: 8; Narimanishvili, 2002: 197-204), provide a clear depiction of the existing social stratification of society. In the Trialeti kurgan tombs, we see the tombs of perhaps great tribal leaders, and in relatively smaller kurgans the intra-tribal aristocracy (Melikishvili & Lordkipanidze, 1989: 66).

The number of kurgan-type tombs found in the high plain areas of Eastern Anatolia, on the other hand, must be due to geographical factors, apart from the cultural and economic reasons we have tried to cover in this study. The peoples of the civilizations that collapsed due to the extreme droughts that started in Eastern Anatolia around 2200 BC left their settlements and started to live in the highlands. The reshaped lifestyle has been one of the reasons for the start of a new "*kurgan*" burial tradition. Although these tombs are monumental, their modesty in terms of grave items is predominantly due to the nomadic lifestyle. It is quite natural to encounter burial vessels decorated with animal figures in these tombs as such a nomadic lifestyle had a livestock-based subsistence economy due to the climatic conditions.

As a result, the Kurgan culture, which started to be adopted in the 5th Millennium BC in Southern Russia and Transcaucasia, developed and elaborated in the 3rd Millennium BC and extended to Eastern Anatolia in the 2nd Millennium BC. It should not be a coincidence that this tradition was practiced in the provinces of Van, Muş, Ağrı, Kars, and Ardahan in Eastern Anatolia. It is indispensable to consider this tomb type in line with the social and economic dynamics of the people who settled in the region. In the social sense, the kurgan burial tradition must have played an active role in the transition to the nomadic lifestyle originating from the arid climate and the interaction with the Transcaucasian peoples through the migration movement. These progressive people of Eastern Anatolia had a livestock-based subsistence economy. Due to the extreme drought, which was recorded to have started around 2200 BC, the people, who had a shortage of water and grass in the lower plains, opted for living in the plateaus where water and grass were abundant. Because of this active way of living, their burial customs have also changed and evolved into a kurgan-type structure stacked up with stones and constructed on high-altitude sites.

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ÇALIŞMANIN ETİK İZİNİ

Yapılan bu çalışmada “Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan “Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler” başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KATKI ORANI

1.yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı % 50, 2. yazarın araştırmaya katkı oranı % 50’dir.

Yazar 1: Doğu Anadolu arkeolojisinde kurgan mezarlar üzerine araştırma ve çalışmalar yürütmüştür. İç ve dış paydaşlar ele alınarak değerlendirmeler yapılmıştır.

Yazar 2: Transkafkasya arkeolojisinde kurgan mezarlar üzerine araştırma ve çalışmalar yürütmüştür. Araştırmaların sonuçları yapılmıştır.

ÇATIŞMA BEYANI

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