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RITUAL OF HUMAN SACRIFICE IN AZERBAIJAN BURIALS DURING THE LATE BRONZE – EARLY IRON AGES

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ABSTRACT

Burial customs such as inhumation and cremation were studied in a large number of kurgans, stone-box and earthen graves belonging to Khojaly-Gadabay, Nakhchivan and Talish - Mughan archaeological cultures in Azerbaijan, as well as cenotaph and skeletonless graves were studied. The dead were buried in different directions, situations, alone, in pairs, or collectively. The custom of human sacrifice in the territory of Azerbaijan was observed in the Boyuk Borsunlu, Akhmakhi, Baimsarov, Dovshanli, Garabulag, Sarichoban kurgans, Ganja and Goygol kurgans, as well as Veri, Joni, Chilakhana, Shir-shir and other stone box graves. Besides the main corpse, the sacrifices who will accompany him to the hereafter, are also buried. One of the facts proving the sacrifice of foreign slaves is the anthropological features of the sacrifices in the Akhmakhi kurgans number 1 and 2. Another interesting fact is that in such graves, the main corpse was usually buried in an extended position, while the accompanying corpses were buried in a seated position. These monuments, which date back to the end of the 2nd millennium and the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C., give an idea of not only the religious outlook, socio-economic situation, but also the military situation of the people of that time.

KEYWORDS

Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, Graves, Burial Customs, The Custom of Sacrificing People

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Introduction.

In the primitive thought of ancient people, all earthly life is regulated by supernatural forces (natural forces, spirits of ancestors, etc.), which can both punish and pacify people. In order to avoid their anger, to obtain what they wanted, as well as to ensure well-being in both worlds (in earthly life and in the afterlife), ancient people believed that these forces needed to deliver various gifts (objects, food, etc.) and sacrifices (human and animal), accompanied by certain rituals.

Intentional human sacrifices, especially during the Late Bronze - Early Iron Ages, in addition to the above, were also associated with the social status of the deceased, when deliberately killed military personnel, servants, slaves, concubines were buried together with the main deceased (an influential and noble member of the tribe) to accompany that noble member to another world.

Discussion.

Among such tombs on the territory of Azerbaijan, unique monuments of the Khojaly-Gadabay culture - the Karabakh kurgans - Boyuk Borsunlu (Cafarov, 1986, p. 3-12), Akhmakhi (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148-153), Baimsarov (Cafarov & Mahmudov, 1986, p. 14-15), Dovshanli (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 136-145), Garabulag (Ivanovskiy, 1911, 157-164), Sarichoban (Cafarov, 1988, p. 21-23; Cafarov & Akhundov, 1988, p. 457-458), Ganja and Göygöl kurgans (Hummel, 1931, p. 6-20), as well as the Veri, Joni, Chilakhana, Shir-shir and other stone boxes (Morgan, 1896, p. 34-38, 43-50, fig. рис. 38, 40; Mahmudov, 2008, p. 68-74) of the Talish - Mughan

culture graves are important; in these graves, the main deceased as well as the accompanying deceased were more often found in a sitting position with their heads bowed.

Moreover, the anthropological characteristics of the skeletons found in Akhmakhi kurgans No. 1, 3 allow us to attribute them to aliens who were enslaved (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148-153).

Consequently, these burials, in addition to providing us with relevant information about the ideological ideas of ancient people, socio-economic differentiation within society, simultaneously, are evidence of inter-tribal wars and wars with neighboring countries.

The number of individuals buried collectively in a single burial chamber together with the main funeral in the Karabakh burial kurgans reached up to ten.

For example, there were 10 dead (1 main and 9 victims; 8 horse skeletons) in the Boyuk Borsunlu kurgan No. 8 (Cafarov, 1986, p. 3); 9 dead (1 main and 8 victims, in two rows) in Akhmakhi kurgan No. 3 (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148-152); 6 dead (1 main and 5 victims; 6 horse skeletons) in the Baimsarov kurgan (Cafarov, & Mahmudov, 1986, p. 14-15); 4 dead (1 main and 3 victims accompanying him in a seated position) in No. 1 Akhmakhi and No. 1 Dovshanli kurgans (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148, 136); 3 dead (1 main and 2 victims; 16 horse skeletons) were found in Sarichoban kurgan (Cafarov, 1988, p. 21-23; Cafarov, & Akhundov, 1988, p. 457-458).

The kurgans with multiple burials investigated by E. Resler in Dovshanli and Akhmakhi villages on the left bank of the Khachinchay River, attract specific attention in terms of their grave structures and funeral rituals. Although there are no differences in the grave inventory that indicate the same timeliness and harmony, there are differences in both burial structure and "class belonging". According to K.H. Kushnareva, these various forms of construction can be explained either by the different tribal affiliations of the buried, or by their different position in society, which requires compliance with a certain burial rite in each case (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 155-156).

Five kurgans with stone box graves covered with stone slabs were examined in Akhmakhi village and one in Dovshanli village.

Dovshanli kurgan No. 2 is original. Here, instead of the usual stone box grave, there are three radially spaced earthen graves, unfortunately only two of these have been investigated. But despite this, the similarity of this kurgan with other Khachinchay kurgans lies in the presence in the inventory of the main and his accompanying deceased, the presence of a horse skull, as well as the bones of a dog and birds of prey, which indicate the nobility of the person buried here. A skeleton lying on its back with its feet pointing towards a common center was found in both earthen graves. The inventory accompanying the dead was next to the skeletons. From above, the graves were covered with soil and pebbles, a mound (kurgan) was built on top. The skeleton of a young individual whose skull belonged to the dolichocephalic type (probably the main funeral) was buried in grave "A" (Fig. 1).

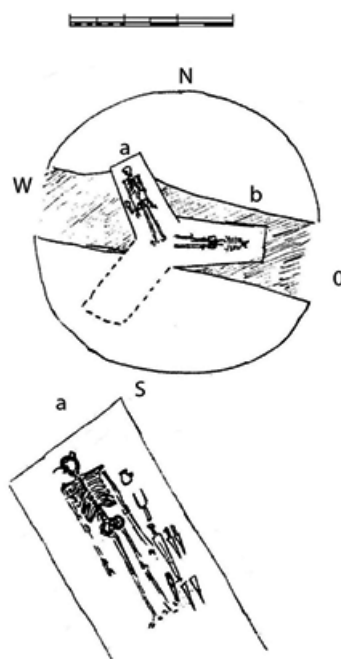


Fig. 1. The kurgan № 2 in the Dovshanli

There was a bronze corona on his skull, and his mouth was full of gold dust. On his right were a horse's skull, wild boar's teeth, bronze rings, and agate beads. On the left shoulder was a small grooved jug; a sword a dagger, a pitchfork, a spearhead, etc. items have been found close to the pelvic. In grave "B" there was a skeleton without a skull, bronze and stone arrowheads, pieces of ceramics, pieces of horse armor, bones of horses, dogs, birds of prey and etc. was found (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 141-145, fig. 6-9).

In Dovshanlı kurgan No. 1, 4 dead people were buried in the stone box under the kurgan. The main dead body (a great commander or leader of a local tribe) was in a supine position, arms extended along the body, there was a bronze corona on his head, the main burial equipment (sword, dagger, tabar axe, scepter head, chisel-shaped tool, there was a ceramic vessel filled with kauri at deceased feet) was nearby and the other deceased is sitting with him (most likely 2 men and 1 woman were ritually killed during the funeral ceremony). The male victims had the remains of a bronze helmet on their heads, next to them were a bit, pitchfork, dagger, bracelet, small ornaments, a stone mortar, a bronze diadem on the woman's head, rings on her hands, bracelets on her legs, nearby were a vessel filled with agate and gold beads and bronze ornaments. Based on the bronze helmets on the heads of the deceased, accompanying combat equipment and horse equipment, rather than the horses themselves (in an amount corresponding to the number of dead), researchers conclude that the main deceased was a military leader and the rest were loyal warriors (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 136-141, fig. 1).

In Ahmahi kurgans No. 1 (Fig. 2) and 3, the main deceased was buried on his right side, with his hands folded on his abdomen, skulls belong to the dolichocephalic local type, next to their heads, there were rough ceramic vessels filled with ashes and bones, as well as a bronze dagger, a Transcaucasian type knife, a cast bronze spearhead, flint arrowheads, bone spearhead, rings and beads were found. Victims (brachycephalic) killed to accompany the deceased were in a sitting position, legs tucked, heads bowed, hands resting on the bottom of the grave. In kurgan No. 3 (Fig. 3), the 8 sacrificed dead were seated closely together in two rows, and their skulls bore traces of blows, proving a violent death. Only an awl, rings, beads and other small tools were found next to these skeletons (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148-152; fig. 12; fig. 13; fig. 16; fig. 17).

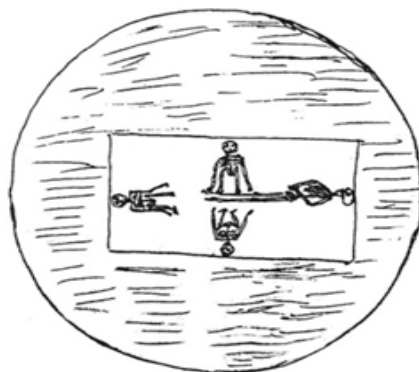


Fig.2. The kurgan № 1 in the Akhmakhi

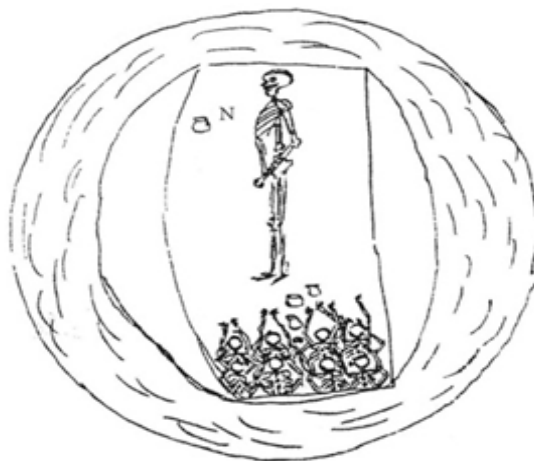


Fig.3. The kurgan № 3 in the Akhmakhi

In contrast, in Ahmahi Kurgan No. 2 it is difficult to identify the main and her accompanying deceased, as only two skeletons have been found here, and the skeletons sit opposite each other. Only the presence of a bronze diadem in the grave and the fact that most of the inventory was found next to one of the skeletons (next to the other skeleton there were 5 different vessels, three vessels containing ashes and horse teeth) suggest that the main deceased was one of them, and he belonged to the "high class" (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 148) (Fig. 4).

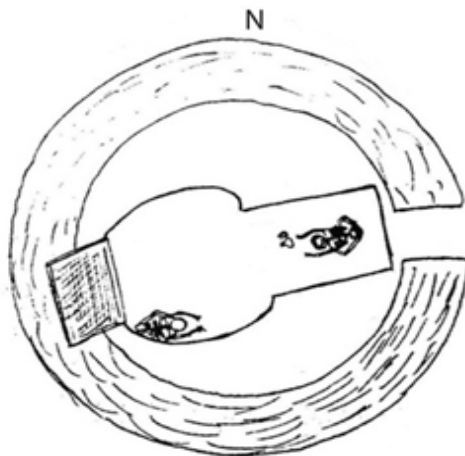


Fig.4. The kurgan № 2 in the Akhmakhi

While in the Akhmakhi kurgans the main dead accompanying the deceased are servants with a small amount of inventory (hence ordinary graves), in the Dovshanli mounds the victims are warriors with a large number of weapons and military equipment (military graves or the graves of a tribal leader) (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 156, 177).

The possibility that the Karabakh kurgans belonged to tribal nobility is further increased by the presence of bronze diadems on skeletal heads in almost all kurgans (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 156). According to K.Kh.Kushnareva, the construction of Khachinchay kurgans dates back to 9-8 centuries BC (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 177). G.F. Jafarov dates back to them to 12-11 centuries BC (Cafarov, 2000, p. 72-76). Similar burial customs are also seen in Garabulag Kurgan No. 91 (Karabakh). In the kurgan, the main deceased was buried lying on his back, next to him were two victims in a sitting position with their backs to the wall (A.A. Ivanovski himself stated that all of the skulls were dolichocephalic). The main grave inventory is centered around the lying dead. The tomb even contains two richly decorated camel skeletons, possibly replacing horses or horse equipment (Ivanovskiy, 1911, p. 157-164, fig. 88-91).

In the Large Stone Kurgan No. 120 in the village of Khojaly, explored by Y.I.Hummel, a man and a woman skeletons, as well as two horses decorated with different beads, were found in a trapezoidal stone box under the kurgan (Kushnareva, 1970, p. 117).

In 1938, near the village of Chardagli in Shamkir district, Y.A. Pakhomov investigated the ruined earthen kurgan. The height of the kurgan is approximately 3-3.5 m and its diameter is 8-10 m. There was a 1.5 m long stone box under the kurgan. More than 3 people and the skeleton of a horse were buried in the grave. There were also many bronze objects and black and red ceramic vessels (Khalilov, 1959, p. 56). By the originality of the burial ceremony, the stone box number 3, investigated by E.A.Resler in Ashagi Dashkesen, is distinguished. Four skeletons were found here, three of them had no skull. The entire skeleton lay in the middle of the grave, crouching, face up, arms folded across his chest. The lower jaw and other bones were displaced. The other three skeletons were in the same position, but without a skull. Separately, the upper jaw of the skeleton was found in the upper part of the grave. There was a pot next to each skeleton (4 in total) (News of the imperial archaeological commission, 1905, p. 13-14).

Another rich kurgan with a unique structure and burial ceremony is kurgan number 1, discovered by Y.I.Hummel in the Goygol region. A large earthen pit (13.3 x 3.5 x 2.8 m) was dug under the kurgan, with a total of 24 wooden supports on the sides (12 on each side) and its walls were lined with the same 12 wooden beams painted with red ochre. A noble person was buried in this central tomb, and as a mark of honor, the tomb was set up as a "tomb in the tomb" with large river pebbles and 2 obelisks. In addition to the skeletons of 3 horses and a rich inventory, 6-7 more skeletons of people who were forcibly killed were found in the

grave. 9 small graves of various types were found in the kurgan, including skeletons of slaves in different positions, possibly including a sitting position (stone box No. 3), and in grave No. 6, the skull of the skeleton was brachycephalic. Y.I.Hummel himself wrote that only the slave found from stone box number 3 was honored, because camel bones and ceramic vessels were found here (Hummel, 1931, p. 6-20, 31) (Fig. 5).

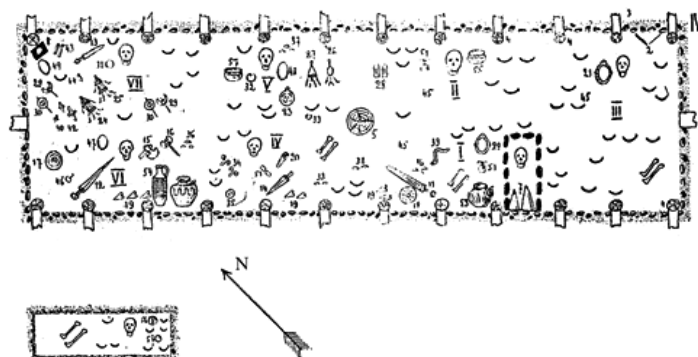


Fig. 5. The kurgan № 1 in the Goygol region

In the south-eastern region of Azerbaijan, there is mass burial in almost all rectangular stone boxes, although sometimes the rooms are small and most of the graves are robbed. The number of dead in these graves is between 2 and 7.

For example, Agha Evlyar (No. 4 - 4 skeletons) (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 68), Veri (No. 1 - 4 skeletons, No. 2 - 2 skeletons) (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 70-71) (Morgan, 1896, p. 34-38, fig. 38, 40) (Kerimov, 2006, p. 21), Chilakhana (No. 3 - 4 skulls, No. ? - 6 skeletons) (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 68-69), Shir-shir (No. 2 - 5 skeleton) (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 69), Joni (No. 1 - 7 skeleton, No. 2 - 2 skeletons, No. 2 - 3 skulls) (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 72-74), Mistail, Aspahiz, Mistan, etc.

F. Mahmudov connects this type with a small group of two-chambered crypts separated by transverse plate partitions. These sections have "windows" at the top (Mahmudov, 2004, p. 15-20). An example of this type of tombs are the tombs in the Joni necropolis (Morgan, 1896, p. 41-42, 48-49, fig. 44, 48). There are almost no skeletons in the largest tombs of Agha Evlyar (for example, tomb number 5), only in a relatively small stone box number 4 four skeletons were found, one of which was supine position and the poses of the rest are unknown. However, there was a rich inventory in the graves (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 68).

The mass graves of the Veri necropolis, where 2 to 4 dead people are buried, attract great attention (Fig. 6).

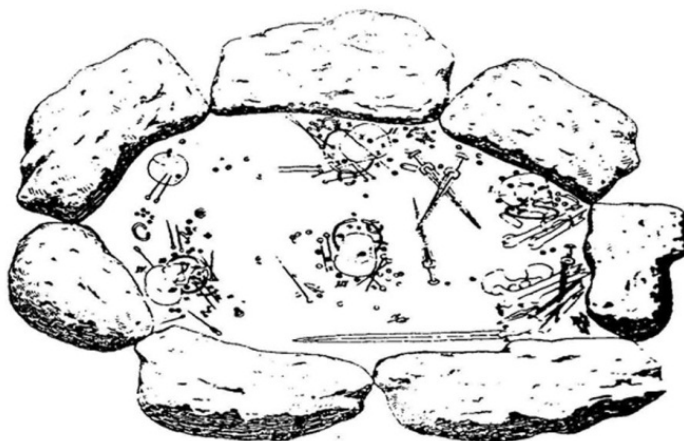


Fig. 6. The stone box of Veri

So, in one stone box (conditional No. 1) four dead were buried - 1 man and 3 women. Based on the burial ritual, researchers suggest that one of the women was a tribal leader and the other two women were servants (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 70-71) (Morgan, 1896, p. 34-38, fig. 38, 40) (Kerimov, 2006, p. 21).

While weapons (drotik, dagger, sword, knife, beads and small gold items) were found next to the male skeleton, decorations, mostly gold, were found next to the female skeletons (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 70-71) (Morgan, 1896, p. 34-38, fig. 38, 40). Two dead were buried in a stone box (conditionally No. 2) at Veri. One skeleton (possibly a man) was crouching on his right side, while the other (possibly a woman) was sitting. While the first skeleton had both jewelry and weapons with him, the second skeleton's burial inventory contained only jewelry (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 70-71). In a stone box grave (conditionally No. 1) located in the Upper Joni necropolis, a total of 7 skeletons were found, 5 on the "lower" floor of the tomb and 2 of them on the "upper" floor. Almost all the skeletons had an inventory consist of ceramic vessels, jewelry, weapons and spindles. It is interestingly that, a diadem was found on the head of only one skeleton from the "lower" layer. But at the same time, the inventory he had with him was no different from the others. According to J. de Morgan, if the tomb had not been destroyed, the number of skeletons would have reached 12 (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 72-74) (Fig. 7).

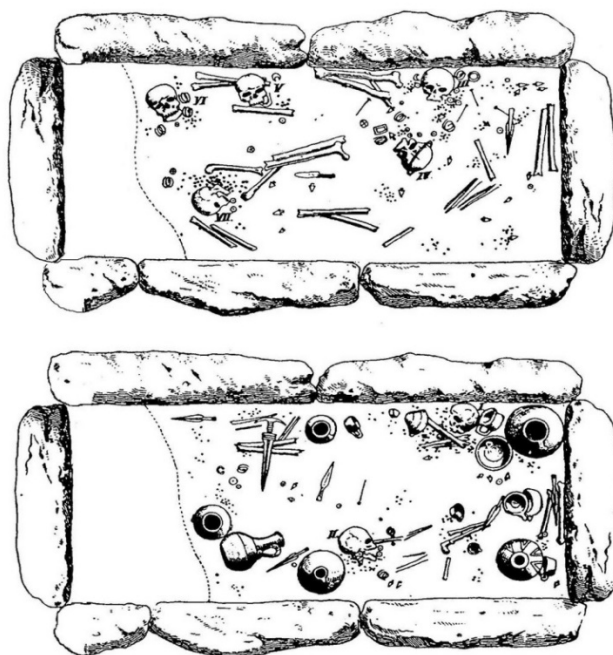


Fig.7. The stone box of Joni

It is worth noting that there are some similarities between the burial ceremonies of the Karabakh kurgans mentioned above and the mentioned monuments of the southeastern region. For example, in the burials of both regions, the main deceased (tribal leader, nobleman or rich person) was buried lying on his back, and the deceased accompanying him (servants, warriors, wives) were buried sitting. Moreover, the main deceased has a headdress on his head that symbolizes his status.

Another similarity in the burial ritual is observed in a stone box on Chilakhana kurgan - grave No 4. 6 dead were buried here. Just like in the Dovshanli kurgan No. 2, the main deceased was laid on his back in the middle of the grave, the other 4 accompanying deceased were with their feet directed towards the main one, and the sixth was in a sitting position (Mahmudov, 2008, p. 92).

The ritual of sacrificing people to God existed even in early medieval Caucasian Albania (Aslanov, 1953, p. 249-250). Pictographic evidence of a human sacrifice ceremony was found on one of the stone slabs at Absheron (Aslanov, 1976, p. 133). As G. Aslanov wrote, the ritual of human sacrifice was completely eliminated in Azerbaijan after the adoption of Islam, but its remnants were preserved (Aslanov, 1976, p. 133). The ritual of human sacrifice is found in a rich kurgan near the village of Tolors in Zangezur, where the leader and his entourage were buried in a stone box tomb (Kushnareva, 1957, p. 155). In ancient Eastern countries such as Iran and Palestine, people were killed (sacrificed) for various purposes, thrown into the foundation of

a sacred building or house, burned, drowned and other methods of sacrifice are known (Aslanov, 1976, p. 131-135; Alekshin, 1986, p. 122-124).

Conclusions

Graves and funeral ceremonies give us the opportunity to study the ideas of people living in ancient times about life and death, the continuation of life and afterlife, to learn about demography, social stratification of society, military, economic and cultural problems, inter-tribal relations, economic situation and professions of ancient people. Based on this, we can say that in the study of the above noted problems, graves from the early period of the II – I millennium BC, where the ritual of human sacrifice of Azerbaijan was encountered, are an invaluable source. The said ritual reflects people's primitive superstitions that it will appease the spirits of ancestors or other gods and be beneficial not only to the deceased in the afterlife, but also to the tribe members in this world, and in parallel, these sacrifices will serve their owner underground.

In addition, the presence of such victims, especially in rare and diverse graves, is indicative of the further deepening of the process of social stratification in the II – early I millennium BC, noble people stood out even in graves where they were distinguished from ordinary tribesmen, and the victims in these graves were often, as can be seen from the shape of the skulls, foreign prisoners.

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