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### Original Research Article

## An Analytic Introduction to the Pre- Urartian Period in the Southern Karadagh, the Northwest of Iranian Plateau, the Case Study: the Rural District of Uch'hāchā

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### Abstract

The cultural sequence, chronology, and archaeological landscape of the geographical distribution of the prehistoric cultures in the peripheral territories of the eastern and northern Urmia Lake regions have not been the focus of any inclusive studies. The basic question of present investigation is the geographical distribution of the Iron Age remains in the Uch'hāchā rural district of Southern Karadagh, the northwest of Iranian plateau. Typologically and chronologically, such remains are the fortified sites and graveyards fall within the Iron Age I-II (pre- Urartian period) c. 1500-800 BC. The grave types are megalith triliths and simple cists and the Caucasian Kurgans. The pre- Urartian settlements have not yet been recognized in the 1650 – 2500m a. b. s. l. The geographical distributions of the Iron Age I-II sites were affected by the mountain landforms. Noticeably, the Iron Age fortified settlements indicate to pastoral- nomad peoples adopted their life in this steppe land. Such a semi- arid and rough mountain land, contrary to Mesopotamia, has no geographical potential for the formation of urban way of life and multi layers archaeological sites, as mounds.

In addition to the transhumance and pastoral- nomad way of life adopted in the pastures of Karadagh and Karabakh, the metallurgical subsistence based on copper and iron mines in the Karadagh, is another theory proposed by the authors. Such a theory should be examined by the methods of archaeological sciences and later archaeological expeditions. The expansion of the realm of Urartian kingdom in this region should be analyzed and understood based on the subsistence desirement and motivations.

**Keywords:** *The northwest of Iranian plateau, The archaeology of Karadagh, The pre-Urartian period, The Iron Age fortified sites, The Iron Age graveyards.*

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## Introduction

The cultural sequence, chronology, and archaeological landscape of the geographical distribution of the prehistoric cultures of the eastern and northern Urmia Lake regions, especially beyond the Tabriz plain towards the east and the natural Tabriz-Miana-Zanjan-Qazvin corridor, has not been the focus of any inclusive studies. The regions in question have been subject of lesser fieldwork compared to the western, southwestern and eastern regions of the lake. The studies hitherto published on the eastern basin tend to cover the plains of Tabriz and Marand, where the geographical distribution of the Iron Age cemeteries and mounds and the Urartian fortresses have attracted more archaeological attention. This very fact, coupled with the focus of the archaeological teams on the western and southwestern Lake Urmia has led to the negligence of the chronology and geographical distribution over the highland of Karadagh in the northern Lake Urmia Basin, which at first sight gives the impression of a trackless, tough expanse. On the other hand, the growing fieldwork on the Qazvin plain (Shahmirzadi, 1999, 35–315), several investigations covering the Mughan plain (Ur & Alizadeh, 2007), the salvage excavations in Khoda'afarin and the Araxes valley, and surveys of the Zanjan plain have all combined to bring southern Karadagh and the town of Ahar into focus as the hub and meeting point of the prehistoric cultures of northwestern Iranian plateau. Southern Karadagh and the Ahar plain lie on the natural corridor that links the Qazvin, Zanjan, Mughan and Meshkinshahr plains and the Araxes valley with the Tabriz plain and eastern Urmia Lake region. Similarly, in prehistoric times Karadagh provided a major line of communication linking the eastern Urmia Lake basin to the South Caucasia. Notwithstanding this geographical and historical prominence, the relative chronology and geographical distribution of the regional archaeological sites are yet to constitute a subject of thorough scholarship. The 2009–2014 field project for recording historical

and cultural monuments of the town of Ahar and southern Karadagh identified a total of 78 sites of a pre-Urartian date (Iron Age I–II) between the altitudinal ranges of 1650–2500 m (Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013; Askarpour & Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2020). Now, questions and assumptions arise as to the Iron Age I-II sites at the Uch'hāchā Rural District of southern Karadagh, as follows:

To begin with, whether the geographical distribution of the pre-Urartian sites in southern Karadagh follow the local environment and mountainous landscape or the cultural dynamics? And then, of what type were the Iron Age I-II sites of southern Karadagh, and what mode of subsistence they are congruent with? Our hypotheses are that, firstly, the location of the sites is merely defined by the physiographical features, and secondly, the sites represent cemeteries and fortified sites consistent with nomadism and pastoralism.

## Theoretical Framework

The Iron Age I-II material culture, which is known in Azerbaijan (northwest plateau of Iran) as the pre-Urartian horizon, marks the transition of the prehistoric nomad and semi-sedentary communities to the verge of the urbanization of the historical cultures of the Late Iron Age (Iron Age III), embodied in the kingdoms of Urartu (Ararat I<sup>1</sup>), and Manna. Indeed, the culture and art of these historical societies and kingdoms were heavily shaped by Mesopotamian influences, to the extent that even Urartu is interpreted as a sort of shadow empire “inextricably connected” to Assyria (Matthews, 2007); in particular, the sociocultural, historical and political landscape of the Karadagh region would undergo transformation after the Araratian (Urartian) domination of northwestern Iranian plateau in about 850 BCE (Iron Age III), thus allowing us to split the Iron Age in northwest Iranian plateau into the two pre-Urartian (Iron Age I-II) and Urartian (Iron Age III) periods (Ajourloo, 2009). Moreover, the climate and mountainous landscape of

Karadagh differ strikingly from those of the lowland Mesopotamia characterized by alluvial plains and great permanent rivers, a fact that rules out the application of the concept “settlement pattern” to the archaeology of Karadagh. Because, the concept of “settlement pattern” entails the possibility of mathematical and statistical analyses to obtain a series of geometric patterns, resulting in an understanding of the interrelation of the socioeconomic network of nomad camps and peripheral rural settlements with the civil cores as well as the settlement hierarchy against the backdrop of geographical features and natural resources (Matthews, 2007).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this geographical aspect is nonexistent in Karadagh:

The mountainous mass of Karadagh, with an average elevation of 2500 meters, encompasses two different climates (Fig. 1): the northern climate or the Arasbārān woodlands, and the southern climate or Southern Karadagh. The Northern Karadagh or Arasbārān features a wet, woodland climate thanks to its proximity to the Araxes, the Kalibarchāy, the Aharchāy, the forest mountains of Caucasian Karabakh,<sup>3</sup> and the snow-catching highlands of South Caucasia. Kalibarchāy and Aharchāy flow to the Araxes and the Caspian basin because of the northern regional slope (Hoveyda, 1973, 39–45; Bakhtiari, 2006, 59, 74). The mountainous southern Karadagh is however characterized by a harsh, semi-arid, low-rain and steppe climate. Geologically, southern Karadagh is composed of Miocene and Paleocene-Eocene formations with igneous and calcite rocks (Bakhtiari, 2006, 60), exhibiting a high concentration of calcareous substrates and salt domes that lead to the salinity or lesser agricultural value of the water (Rajabi & Khatibi Bayati, 2012, 144–146, 153). Soil scarcity prevails across southern Karadagh, and in many cases, in particular around the Mount Sheyvar (2570 m), the spread of rocky beds and rocky expanses lacking sufficient soil excludes any agricultural activities, though in case of ample winter and spring precipitations it will supply

good summer pastures for herders. Likewise, the steppes, narrow flood-prone valleys characterizing southern Karadagh precludes sedentary settlement and farming. The existing scattered villages or those such as the large village of Angurt lie at lower elevations than the Mount Sheyvar and overlook the Ahar plain as the latter is situated at an altitude of 1360 m. Indeed, it is notable that the paucity of soil suitable for agriculture does not mean the dearth of Karadaghian mineral deposits. Rather, regional iron and copper deposits have been quarried since ancient times through traditional methods, playing a role in the subsistence of the local communities.<sup>4</sup>

A further dynamic fueling the harsh climate in the southern Karadagh steppe is water shortage and subsequent droughts. Kalibarchāy, Gög Gonbad, Andrāb and Ajichāy are the sole permanent rivers in Karadagh, none of which water southern Karadagh. The Kalibarchāy pours into the Araxes after irrigating northern Karadagh and crossing the forest slopes of Arasbārān. The Andrāb and Ajichāy (saline and salty) drain into the Gilan and the Lake Urmia basins, respectively (Hoveyda, 1973, 39–45; Bakhtiari, 2006, 18, 59, 62, Rajabi & Khatibi Bayati, 2012, 5–7). Hence, seasonal precipitation and mountain springs constitute the only sources of water supply in southern Karadagh. Indeed, a summer drought will leave a serious room for delay. Because, the pastoral nomad groups of southern Karadagh typically encamp in this area only during the summer in their vertical movements, and in case of insufficient autumn and winter precipitation, they will be forced to seek other pastures.

Their distinct landscape confers the southern Karadagh and Sheyvar uplands dominance over their surroundings, including the plains of Ahar and Mughan as well the Araxes valley. The Karadagh mountain mass runs 230 km east-west and 70 km north-south, with an average altitude of 2500 m, preventing the penetration of Sabalan’s cool summer winds and the Araxes’s moisture into southern



Fig. 1. The geographical location of Karadagh mountain range in the NW Iranian highland; No. 1, the rural district of Uch'hāchā in the south of Mt. Sheyvar, No. 2, the archaeological site of Khoda'afain in the Araxes valley. Source: authors based on a map derived from The Geographical Atlas of Iranian Provinces, Scale 1:1600,000.

Karadagh. Azerbaijani Karadagh is separated with the Araxes valley from the forest mountains of Caucasian Karabakh, and while reaching Mount

Sabalān through the Qoshādāgh Mountain on the east, it is detached by the Ajichāy valley from the Sorkhāb Mountain, the Tabriz plain and the Bozqoush

Mountain on the south, and by the Daradiz (steeped valley) pass and the Jolfa- Araxes depression from the Ararat mountains and the eastern Anatolian plateau on the west (Hoveyda, 1973, 39–45, Rajabi & Khatibi Bayati, 2012, 7–5). Hence, the southern Ahar plain and the fault of the Ajichāy valley mark the southern border of southern Karadagh. It is noteworthy that the natural linkage of the Mughan plain and the Araxes valley with the Tabriz plain is possible through the Ahar tableland, which can be approached via Karadagh (Razmara, 1938, 36–42). In the past, the pastoral groups could reach the pastures of southern Caucasus and the forests of the Caucasian Karabakh proceeding through the natural passage of the Khoda'afarin gorge in the Araxes valley. In our days, nomads reach the Ahar town through southern Karadagh, and commute between Sheyvar Mountain and the Mughan plain as part of their seasonal movements.

From the discussions above, it is clear that the geographical setting of Karadagh by no means furnished the conditions required for the rise of civilization and urbanism inspired by the socio-cultural-economic expansion and dynamism and the social growth of rural settlements, as is the case with Mesopotamia. Therefore, in any attempt to analyze and understand the archaeological landscape of the pre-Urartian southern Karadagh adhering to the concept of “geographical distribution” appears particularly relevant than the term “settlement pattern”.

### Research background and methodology

The available picture of the archaeological landscape of Iron Age Karadagh relies on the salvage excavations in the Khoda'afarin area, Arasbārān/northern Karadagh, the tradition of Caucasian kurgans (Ayorloo & Askarpour, 2012; Iravani, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018; Iravani et al., 2018), and the excavation of the Iron Age site of Zardkhāna in Ahar (Niknami, 2014), not to mention the

field investigations of Ahar and Kalibar counties (Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013) as well as a study concerning the geomatics analysis of the death landscape regarding the geographical distribution of Iron Age cemeteries of Karadagh (Askarpour & Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2020). Whilst a look into the background of regional research reveals that the available information is by far outweighed by the unknown, new data are available on the Iron Age landscape of Karadagh thanks to the recent fieldworks:

Uch'hāchā rural district is in southern Karadagh, on the foothills of Sheyvar Mountain northwest of the Ahar county (see Fig. 1). Following a preliminary visit, part of Uch'hāchā Rural district, encompassing the villages of Angurt and Zangābād and covering a total area of about 90 square km, was subjected to intensive survey. Based on a geomatics approach, the survey began from the village of Angurt on the north and ended in the village of Zangābād on the south, recording a total of 46 sites dating to the Iron Age I-II (Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013; Askarpour & Tirandaz-Lalehzari, 2020).

### Findings

The findings of this fieldwork comprise the 46 sites that were identified in Uch'hāchā. They fall in the typological classes of fort, fortified settlements, and cemeteries. The typology of pottery sherds and grave types, the complex can be relatively dated to the chronological horizon of the Iron Age I-II.

#### • Fort (Qalajiq)

Denoting a small stronghold in Azerbaijani folklore and in Azerbaijani Turkic, Qalajiq corresponds to ‘Dizaj’ (Dezhak) in old Azerbaijani Pahlavi.<sup>5</sup> The authors use the term ‘Qalajiq’ to refer to a structure outlined with a dry laid wall of large and smaller rubbles, with the interior space in turn separated into small, roofed partitions again with dry-stone walls. A cemetery also occurs close to the structure. The fort are built on high points, dominating hillsides

and slopes suitable for livestock and lower lands suitable for dry farming, adjacent cemeteries and occasionally springs and streams. In Uch'hāchā of southern Karadagh, a fort was identified in the hillocks surrounding the village of Zangābād (Table 1, Fig. 2).

#### • Fortified Site

Here, the term fortified site designates a place in a round, elliptical or quasi-square plan with an encircling wall of large and small dry stacked rubbles (see Fig. 2), lacking any sort of ceiling, covering or interior space division. Fortified sites served a range of purposes, among them being a temporary stronghold and bulwark (Biscione, 2003), a fold for livestock or a curbing for nomad camps. In some cases, the enclosing wall was buried by sediments over time. The fortified sites of southern Karadagh are concentrated around the passes and high points overlooking valleys and water resources; and they tend to lie between the altitudinal ranges of 1700 to 2500 m. Such sites in southern Karadagh split into two sub-classes: one with and the second without a contiguous cemetery. In Uch'hāchā, 3 instances of the later sub-class and 6 examples of the latter were recorded (see Table 1). Those associated with a cemetery invariably contain a single or more pre-Uratian burials dating to the Iron Age.

#### • Iron Age I-II cemeteries

Representing extramural burial grounds, they come in 3 main classes and 2 sub-classes:

##### - Caucasian kurgans

A Caucasian kurgan is a sort of burial mound consisting of several layers of soil and rubbles forming a hump, with the deceased buried in the lower layers, and within the overlaying soil and rubble layers were deposited as burial gifts various objects such as pottery and bronze or sometimes iron tools; occasionally skulls belonging to other individuals also occur. These material are found scattered over the soil and rubble layers during excavations (Ajrloo & Askarpour, 2012; Iravani, 2011, 2013,

2014, 2015, 2018; Iravani et al., 2018). Above the ground on the surface, a Caucasian kurgan usually include a stone arrangement in the form of a circle or ovoid, generally exceeding 10 m in diameter, with the circle or ovoid itself showing a thickness of above 1.5 m on the surface. In southern Karadagh, such monuments will have a stone covering if they are in high and windy passes away from water resources or on a rocky bed, while those in lower places close to water show a covering of dirt and mud. Overall, these burials average about 3 m in height. During the Karadagh Project of authors, 2 examples of such graves were recorded in Uch'hāchā (see Table 1, Fig. 2).

##### - Simple inhumations

Simple inhumation or simple pit burial typifies the Iron Age Iranian Plateau and related structures are particularly known from the Urmia Lake region and the Iron Age cemetery adjoining the Blue Mosque of Tabriz (Tala'i, 2008, 131). It involves a simple pit dug in the soil into which the deceased was placed, and the pit was then covered with stone blocks. During the survey of southern Karadagh, a total of 7 such graves were identified, all in Uch'hāchā (see Table 1, Fig. 2).

##### - Megalithic

This grave type is formed of gigantic stone slabs (Childe, 1968). Typologically, the related structures recorded in southern Karadagh are divisible into 3 sub-types. It is notable that the type of so-called 'Stone Table Dolmen' is yet to be identified in the region by the authors.

##### 1. Simple Cist

In this case, a pit with a depth of about 1 m was prepared and its walls were then covered in rubbles of varying sizes. Once the body was interred, the grave was covered with colossal stone slabs, which lack a regular geometric shape and were apparently favored simply because of their size and weight. The types of burials are usually buried under the sediments and are not readily discernible. Their dimensions do not

Table 1. Information on the recognized Iron Age I-II sites from Uch'hāchā. Source: authors.

No.	Type	Code	Relative chronology	Geographical specification	Geographical location	Area (m.)	Altitude (m.)	Remarks
01	Small fort	AH. 171	Iron Age	a hill, looking a valley	Zangabad	700x400	2014	Qalajiq
02	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 105	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Zangabad	180x120	1922	Including later Islamic layers
03	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 130	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Zangabad	160x140	2184	Including later Islamic layers
04	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 131	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	80x60	2183	Including later Islamic layers
05	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 035	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Agurt	150x80	1904	
06	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 053	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a river bed	Agurt	280x250	1803	
07	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 057	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Agurt	170x100	2028	
08	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 093	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	350x150	1761	
09	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 116	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Zangabad	400x220	1933	
10	Fortified site with no graves	AH. 152	Iron Age	a hill, looking a river bed	Zangabad	600x400	1839	
11	Caucasia type kurgan	AH. 099	pre- Urartian	Slope of a valley	Zangabad	50x40	1795	
12	Caucasia type kurgan	AH. 173	pre- Urartian	Slope of a valley	Zangabad	100x100	1756	
13	Pit grave	AH. 077	pre- Urartian	a hill, looking a valley	Agurt	80x50	1882	
14	Pit grave	AH. 085	pre- Urartian	Slope of a mount	Zangabad	200x150	1847	
15	Pit grave	AH. 106	pre- Urartian	Beside a nomad road	Zangabad	210x170	1890	
16	Pit grave	AH. 126	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	110x90	2051	
17	Pit grave	AH. 144	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	200x180	1860	
18	Pit grave	AH. 148	pre- Urartian	On slope of a hill, beside a nomad road	Zangabad	60x40	1992	
19	Pit grave	AH. 165	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	110x100	2492	
20	Cist grave	AH. 031	pre- Urartian	On a hill, looking a river bed	Agurt	300x200	1897	
21	Cist grave	AH. 032	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Agurt	150x130	1863	
22	Cist grave	AH. 033	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Agurt	120x90	1870	
23	Cist grave	AH. 083	pre- Urartian	Slope of a valley	Zangabad	70x40	1771	
24	Cist grave	AH. 084	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	80x50	1785	
25	Cist grave	AH. 087	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	70x30	1759	

Continuation of Table 1.

No.	Type	Code	Relative chronology	Geographical specification	Geographical location	Area (m.)	Altitude (m.)	Remarks
26	Cist grave	AH. 096	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	170x90	1765	
27	Cist grave	AH. 101	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	110x50	1747	
28	Cist grave	AH. 110	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	90x40	2219	
29	Cist grave	AH. 114	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill	Zangabad	50x40	1826	
30	Cist grave	AH. 135	pre- Urartian	Slope of a hill, beside a nomad road	Zangabad	80x40	2269	
31	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 078	pre- Urartian	On a rock	Zangabad	90x80	1892	
32	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 080	pre- Urartian	On slope of a hill, beside a nomad road	Zangabad	15x10	1912	
33	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 082	pre- Urartian	On a rock	Zangabad	90x65	1777	
34	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 086	pre- Urartian	Slope of a mount	Zangabad	20x15	1832	
35	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 098	pre- Urartian	On a rock	Zangabad	40x20	1827	
36	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 103	pre- Urartian	Slope of a mount	Zangabad	90x60	1764	
37	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 125	pre- Urartian	Slope of a valley	Zangabad	50x40	1795	
38	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 127	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	150x80	2114	
39	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 132	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	80x60	2161	
40	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 136	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	45x15	2042	
41	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 137	pre- Urartian	Slope of a valley	Zangabad	15x50	2024	
42	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 146	pre- Urartian	Slope of a mount	Zangabad	10x10	1847	
43	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 147	pre- Urartian	Slope of a mount	Zangabad	80x70	1860	
44	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 151	pre- Urartian	On a rock	Zangabad	120x80	2054	
45	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 174	pre- Urartian	On a hill	Zangabad	50x50	1714	
46	Trilith entrance grave	AH. 181	pre- Urartian	On a rock	Zangabad	50x50	1890	

typically exceed 3 m. The Southern Karadagh Project yielded 11 related graves in Uch'hāchā (see Table 1; Fig. 2).

## 2. Trilithon

A trilith grave or trilithic entrance is a type of dolmen (*ibid.*) in which a mostly ovoid cavity was dug to a

depth of about 2 m before its walls were clad in on all four sides by a row of upright, flat and colossal stone slabs to create an almost rectilinear space, which was then topped by a series of, usually three, gigantic stones laid horizontally. These were in turn covered with smaller stones. These burial monuments





Fig. 2. Typologically selected samples from the archaeological sites in Uch'hāchā, the south Karadagh. Clockwise: Small fort (Qalajiq/ Dizaj), Fortified site, Caucasian kurgan, Pit grave, Cist grave and Trilith entrance grave. Source: authors.

are in cases buried under the sedimentary soils, while in others parts of the upper stone revetment are exposed. In general, they appear as fairly high humps with a soil surface covering. In the course of the Karadagh Project 16 instances were recorded in Uch'hāchā (Table 1; Fig. 2).

## Discussion

The authors propose to treat the relative chronology and the geographical distribution of the pre-Urartian horizon of southern Karadagh in comparison with other major excavated Iron Age I-II sites of Azerbaijan in three separate sections on pottery, burials, and fortified sites.

Judging from the excavated assemblages from such sites as Hasanlu VI-IV and burial contexts at Dinkha, Yanik Tepe, Geoy Tepe and the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, the grey-black incised and or burnished pottery of the Iron Age I-II in the Urmia

Lake region is mainly typified by tripod footed/ pedestal base/stemmed, spouted, tulip wares, button-based, drinking vessels/tankards/beakers, and pitchers (Tala'i, 1995a, 33-122; 1995b). The survey of southern Karadagh did not produce any of these forms. The pieces that were obtained from a number of the regional graves by smugglers represent a range of simple handmade and rather coarse jars ranging in color from brick red and light reddish brown. The principal forms are simple and plain collared rim jars with an s-shaped profile, quite simple bowls or simple vats (see Table 2, Fig. 3). Also, it is a well-known fact that the Iron I-II period witnessed the gradual shift from the grey-black to solid red surface color due to technical advances in kilns and firing control, a development that in turn heralded the introduction of the outstanding wheel made buff ware typical to the Iron III period in about 800 BCE (see Tala'i, 1995a; 2008). In the assemblages from across the Lake Urmia region, only simple collared rim s-shaped jars and the quite simple buff bowls of the Iron III period from Hasanlu IIIIB (Tala'i, 1995a, 137, fig. 9-43), Zendan-e Suleiman (Tala'i, 1995a, 137, fig. 45, 1-5), and Agrab Tepe (Muscarella, 1973, figs. 9, 15, 1, 16, 5) somehow provide parallels for the material from southern Karadagh. Related pieces are also notable from the burials of Dinkhah dating to the Iron I-II period (Muscarella, 1974, pl. 6,974, pl. 12, 952). However, parallels for the simple s-shaped jars and simple bowls of southern Karadagh occur in the Iron I burials of Nakhchivan, falling within the horizon of Iron II in the Lake Urmia region, at Qazançı qalası and Oğlanqala (Bəxşəliyev, 2004, 172-73, figs. 46-47), Haqiliq (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 106-08), Beg Ahmed (Seyidov, 2003, 215, fig. 67; Bəxşəliyev, 2004, 178, fig. 52; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 114) and Kolani (Seyidov, 2003, 202, fig. 62; Bəxşəliyev, 2004; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 109-10), Sari Dara (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 102), Deymi Yerlar (ibid., 115) and Qumluq (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 117). Thus, relatively in a nutshell,

Table 2. The physical specification of Iron Age I-II pottery shreds from Uch'hächä. Source: authors.

No.	Type	Context	Form	Technique	Fabrication	Temper	Firing	Decoration	Burnish	Coating	Color	Core	Span (mm)
Ah 78, No. 1	Grey ware	Grave	Rim, base, body	Handmade	Coarse	Fine sand	Sufficient	Incised	No	slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	12
Ah 78, No. 3	Buff ware	grave	Rim, lug	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient		Yes	slip	Smokey buff	Smokey, spongy	-
Ah 78, No. 4	Buff ware	grave	body	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Insufficient	Incised		Slip	Smokey	Smokey, spongy	-
Ah 98, No. 1	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	9
Ah 98, No. 2	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			slip	Dark grey	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 98, No. 5	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient	Incised		Slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 98, No. 6	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 98, No. 8	Grey ware	Grave	Body	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient	Incised		Slip	Dark grey	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 171, No. 9	Buff ware	Surface	Rim, lug	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 171, No. 3	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Fine	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	5
Ah 171, No. 15	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Fine	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	5
Ah 171, No. 6	Buff ware	Surface	Body	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 171, No. 12	Buff ware	Surface	Body	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Insufficient			Slip	Dark buff	Smokey, spongy	6
Ah 171, No. 1	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	6
Ah 171, No. 4	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient	Incised		Slip	Dark grey	Smokey, spongy	11
Ah 171, No. 11	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Handmade	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	buff	Smokey, spongy	11
Ah 171, No. 16	Buff ware	Surface	Body	Handmade	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Dark buff	Smokey, spongy	13
Ah 171, No. 18	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 171, No. 5	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Dark grey	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 171, No. 7	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient	Incised		Slip	buff	Smokey, spongy	13
Ah 171, No. 8	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			Slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 171, No. 10	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Coarse	Sand	Insufficient			Slip	Dark buff	Smokey, spongy	17
Ah 171, No. 13	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient	Applied		Slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	6
Ah 171, No. 2	Buff ware	Surface	Rim, lug	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 171, No. 14	Buff ware	Surface	Body	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 181, No. 1	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Sand	Insufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	6
Ah 181, No. 2	Grey ware	Grave	Rim, body	Handmade	Fine	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	5
Ah 181, No. 4	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Sand	Insufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 126, No. 2	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Pale grey	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 126, No. 3	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient	Incised		Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 106, No. 1	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	9
Ah 106, No. 2	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 106, No. 5	Grey ware	Surface	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Fine sand	Sufficient			Slip	Greyish buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 93, No. 1	Grey ware	Grave	Rim	Handmade	Medium	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Grey	Smokey, spongy	6

Continuation of Table 2.

No.	Type	Context	Form	Technique	Fabrication	Temper	Firing	Decoration	Burnish	Coating	Color	Core	Span (mm)
Ah 93, No. 2	Buff ware	Surface	Lug	Handmade	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient	Hole	Yes	Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	37
Ah 93, No. 3	Buff ware	Grave	Rim	Wheel made	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient		Yes	Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	7
Ah 93, No. 6	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient			Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 96, No. 1	Buff ware	Grave	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Fine sand	Insufficient	Incised		Slip	Buff	Smokey, spongy	10
Ah 96, No. 2	Buff ware	Grave	Rim, body	Handmade	Medium	Sand	Sufficient				Buff	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 105, No. 7	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient	Incised			Buff	Smokey, spongy	8
Ah 152, No. 1	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Wheel made	Medium	Sand	Sufficient				Buff	Smokey, spongy	6
Ah 152, No. 2	Buff ware	Surface	Rim	Handmade	Coarse	Sand	Sufficient		Yes		Buff	Smokey, spongy	11



Fig.3. Typologically selected samples of the Iron Age I-II pottery shreds from Uch'hāchā, the south Karadagh Source: authors.

the pottery assemblages from southern Karadagh appear to belong to the chronological horizon of the Iron Age I-II, an observation that is in full agreement with the burial traditions and grave types.

Indeed, the mortuary practices and graves of the pre-Urartian period of southern Karadagh are at odds with those from the Lake Urmia Basin, being rather comparable with those of Caucasian sites. In particular, the megalithic graves and Caucasian kurgans are yet unattested in the Lake Urmia region, and judging by the excavated sites in the latter region, the trilith entrance and Caucasian kurgan types were not among the mortuary practices typical of the Iron Age of northwest Iran (Tala'i, 2008, 3); and while R. Girshman compared the cairn graves of Silak VIB to the European dolmens (Tala'i, 2009, 123), one should bear in mind that in the 1930s, he was not aware of cultural and social ties between northern and northwestern Iranian plateau and Caucasia in the Iron Age, a negligence that even continued into the 1960s at the Marlik excavations, so that in Negahban's interpretations of the Iron Age material from the latter, the Mesopotamian world assumes the highest weight (Tala'i, 1995a).

The Caucasian kurgan type and the megalithic graves of the Iron I-II horizon apparently await discovery in southern Karadagh as the excavated Iron Age cemeteries in southwestern Lake Urmia region, Varkabad of Luristan, Kaluraz of Gilan and Chaleh-Kuti in north have solely produced the Iron II and III stone-chamber and cist grave types (Tala'i, 2008, 3). A few simple pit burials at the Blue Mosque of Tabriz (*ibid.*, 131) and mud brick-lined and simple inhumations form Dinkha (Tala'i, 2008, 130; Muscarella, 1974) are notable. It is noteworthy that the Iron III graves published as tumuli from Sé Girdan of West Azerbaijan Province (Muscarella, 1969, 1971) in fact represent Scythian kurgans. Whereas the tumulus tradition originally belongs to the historical civilizations of Phrygia, Lydia and the pre-classical Aegean, notable among them

being the famous examples of Gordion and Atreus (Akurgal, 2011, 282; Kleiner, 2011, 93–94), the Scythian kurgans trace their roots to the Eurasian Steppe (Burney & Lang, 1971, 79–80). Moreover, the Caucasian Kurgans of Karadagh typologically relate to the excavated burials from the Khoda'afarin area and the Iron Age Nakhchivan, where they are known as the Kolani or Khwaja Ali-Gada Beig and Sari Dara culture (Ajourloo & Askarpour, 2012; Bəxşəliyev, 2007; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009; Iravani, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2018; Iravani et al., 2018).

Moreover, comparable instances to the pre-Urartian cist graves of southern Karadagh are attested throughout Nakhchivan: Haqiliq (Seyidov, 2003, 209; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 106), Kolani (Seyidov, 2003, 202; Bəxşəliyev, 2004; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 115), Deymi Yerlar (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 115), Sari Dara (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 102), Qumluq (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 117) and Beig Ahmed (Seyidov, 2003, 215; Bəxşəliyev, 2004, 178; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 114). And, regarding the trilith entrance type, examples from Sari Dara (Seyidov & 2003, 207–08) and Kolani (Seyidov, 2003, 202; Bəxşəliyev, 2004; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 115) and Haqiliq (Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009, 106–08) are remarkable.

Therefore, in a nutshell, the mortuary tradition and grave types of southern Karadagh diverge from those of the Lake Urmia Basin, and in principle, the graves of the former region should be placed in the Caucasian Kurgan and megalithic graves category, which truly typifies the nomad cultures of Caucasia in the latter half of the 2nd and early 1st millennium BC; the megalithic and dolmen varieties of these graves have been relatively dated between ca. 1200–900 BCE in southern Caucasia and eastern Anatolia (Yükmen, 2003). From Oqlan Qala of Nakhchivan, a radiocarbon absolute date in about 1200 BCE is available (Bəxşəliyev et al., 2010), which agrees with the relative date of 1200 to 900 BCE suggested for the kurgans and cists of

Nakhchivan (Bəxşəliyev, 2007; Bəxşəliyev & Marro, 2009), a timespan corresponding to the pre-Urartian Iron Age of northwest Iranian highland.

It is worth noting here that, in his surveys of Meshkinshahr, C. Burney (1979) was able to record megalithic graves as well as the stone-cut figures attributed to the Balbal or Maktab Uşaqları culture, also known as the anthropomorphic stelae, which are dated to the later centuries of the 2nd millennium BCE, and aside from Burney's proposed relative chronology, still accentuate the fact that the culture was imported from Caucasia in the second half of the 2nd and early 1st millennium BCE (Yükmen, 2003; Sevin, 2005); it thus seems plausible to classify the southern Karadagh graves to the pre-Urartian, Iron Age I-II horizon, by virtue of relative chronology.

Regardless of pottery and megalithic graves discussed above, the fortified sites of southern Karadagh is relatively datable to the pre-Urartian period of Azerbaijan in light of the typologies available from such neighboring areas as Shibli Pass (Kleiss & Kroll, 1992), the western Lake Urmia basin (Biscione, 2005), and Nakhchivan (Belli & Sevin, 1999); indeed, care should be taken not to intermix the data from the burial contexts and the data from the settlement contexts in the research methodology (Tala'i, 1995a, 1997, 2008). Thus, putting the focus on the pottery assemblages from the interior and immediate areas outside these settlement sites, a date in Iron Age I-II appears a credible proposal for those published here from Uch'hächā, as not a single piece of Urartian pottery or even wheel made buff pottery of the Late Iron Age is known from the sites in question. And, it is particularly notable that these fortified sites were established in the passes dominating mountain routes and at points overlooking the valleys or nearby lowlands or water resources below and possibly served as a sort of simple, nomad hill forts.

## Conclusion

Early settlements dating to the pre-Urartian Iron

Age have not been identified in the altitudinal range 1650 to 2500 m in the southern part of Karadagh. Yet, one should note that the rugged terrain in the semi-arid, steppe mountains of south Karadagh immensely shaped the distribution of Iron Age cultural material, so that here the geographical distribution of the Iron Age I-II monuments solely follows the variables related to the physiographical landscape. In particular, single graves occur along the mountainous communication networks, while cemeteries are concentrated in relatively lower localities that afforded collective occupation thanks to the flat terrain and accessible water resources. Therefore, the single burials by the routes seem to represent deceased commuters or members of the nomad groups in their seasonal movements.

Also, fortified sites lie close to water resources, at points with visual control over the surrounding, and in natural mountain passes. Therefore, the hypothesis of the contingency of settlement on cultural variables does not stand up to validation in the case of southern Karabakh, where the role of geographical factors is verifiable.

The rugged, mountainous, steppe, and rocky terrain of southern Karadagh ostensibly vetoed the genesis and spread of such multi-level sites as mounds; and an ancient nomad culture hinging on transient seasonal nomad camps appears a pretty reasonable and promising hypothesis in light of the prevailing graves and fortified sites with associated burial grounds. At any rate, the verification or disproval of this very hypothesis rests on the cultural and social/cultural anthropological models that should be evaluated and interpreted against the principles of the anthropological archaeology; a primary prerequisite of the latter is indeed geomatics analyses of the landscape which should be ensued by imminent excavations; and the final step will concern analyzing the resultant data with reference to southern Caucasia. In addition to transhumance and nomad pastoralism in Karabakh and Karadagh meadowlands, extracting

copper and iron, viz. the two most commonly used metals of the Iron Age West Asia, from Karadagh quarries, represents a further archaeological theory proposed by the authors which, though lying beyond the scope of the present paper, calls for excavations and archaeo-metallurgical analyses, ethno-archaeological studies and geomatics evaluations. For, a fitting examination and understanding of Urartian kingdom's expansion towards Karadagh will be impossible without taking into account its economic incentives, and it looks obvious that copper and iron could outweigh livestock in setting up the related campaigns and territorial expansion.

All in all, in light of data at hand, the archaeological points of the pre-Urartian southern Karadagh are of fortified sites type and are compatible with a life defined by pastoralism and vertical seasonal movement; and to conclude, southern Karadagh landscape between 1200 to 800 BCE consisted of pastoral-nomad cultures whose movement originated and began from South Caucasia and the forest mountains of Caucasian Karabakh; this is to say that crossing the Khoda'afarin gorge, they set up a sort of vertical mobilization system between pastures of the Khoda'afarin valley and the woodlands of Arasbārān and the steppe heights of southern Karadagh, even extending towards the Ahar plain and the northern Sahand mountain. However, in view of the comparisons of the available material with those from the Meshkinshahr highlands in the eastern extreme of Karadagh and towards the slopes of Sabalan as well as the Araxes valley, it is proposed that the cultural landscape of the pre-Urartian Iron Age of southern Karadagh be interpreted and analyzed against the broader and trans-regional context of Caucasian Karabakh-Azerbaijani Karadagh.

## Endnote

1. The term Uruatri, romanized as Urartu in current European languages, and translated into Persian in the same form, occurs as Ararat in the Hebrew Bible and, consequently, in Armenian. Mount Ararat gets its name from its location in the old territory of Uruatri (Urartu). Mount Ararat is referred to as Mount Masis in Armenian, where the terms

Hay and Hayaštani designate the Armenian ethnicity and Armenia, respectively.

2. For example, the works of Robert McCormick Adams and Hans Nissen to ascertain the settlement pattern and understand the settlement hierarchy in Mesopotamia is noteworthy (Matthews, 2007).

3. For the term Caucasian Karabakh: (Keyhan, 1932a, 65–66).

4. Even during the Qajarids, a Scottish steel company had invested in the copper and iron deposits of Karadagh (Keyhan, 1932b, 257).

5. Authors, such as Hamad A. Muštawfi Qazvini and Evlia Chelabi, writing in the Safavid period has mentioned a variant of old Pahlavi dialect in Azerbaijan.

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