



An Investigation in to the Chalcolithic Period of the Moghan Plain in Light of Archaeological Data from Yatag Tepesi, Azerbaijan

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Abstract

The Aras and other rivers running across the Moghan region played an important role in the formation of prehistoric sites. The Moghan plain has not so far received the scholarly attention it deserves. While extensive scientific activities have covered the Lake Urmia Basin, this plain has for the most part remained neglected. Yatag Tepesi, a prehistoric site in Germe, Moghan, was subjected to a systematic investigation. The main objective of this paper is to introduce the pottery traditions and to determine the chronological sequence of the site. To gain a more detailed understanding of cultural interactions with other regions and to ascertain the chronological sequence of the site in the Chalcolithic period, the following questions were raised: To which cultural period(s) does Yatag Tepesi date based on the recovered cultural evidence, including the pottery? The main hypothesis is that the site relates to the Middle Chalcolithic (LC1) and Late Chalcolithic (LC2–3). Judging from the available evidence, to which regions does the site exhibit the closet links? Our analyses indicate contacts and affinities with other parts of northwest Iran, most notably the Qaradagh region and the Lake Urmia Basin, and South Caucasia. The paper adopts a descriptive-analytical approach. The results of the study suggest that in light of the pottery and other lines of evidence, Yatag Tepesi maintained interactions with other centers of northwest Iran, and flourished between 3700/3600–4500 BCE.

Keywords: Yatag Tepesi, Moghan Plain, Germe, Chalcolithic Period, Azerbaijan.

Article Type: Short Article

Introduction

Thanks to its favorable conditions and obvious geographical location, northwestern Iran displays a sequence of settlements that span the prehistoric times up to the Islamic periods. This part of the Iranian plateau has long assumed a prominent place in prehistoric studies of Iran due to its proximity to such great cultural spheres as South Caucasia, Anatolia, Zagros, Mesopotamia and Central Iranian Plateau. The Moghan plain is a region of northwest Iran to the west of the Caspian Sea and north of Ardabil province (northeastern Azerbaijan), and consists of geographical features rather different from other parts of Azerbaijan (Alizadeh, 2009).

Barzand Ghalasi, an ancient fort and the closet archaeological landmark to the site of Yatag Tepesi, lies on the historical road of “Gafgaz Yolu,” in the Barzand Rural District of Germe County. The fort sites amidst the Barzand valley on the west bank of Barzand Chay at an altitude above sea level of 493 m. It is covered by a surface pottery scatter that runs a length of 10 km and a width of 4 km. Yatag Tepesi lies within the confines of this same surface scatter (Mohammadi,2018) (Figure. 1).

The main objective of this article is to introduce the attested pottery traditions and determine the represented periods. In order to achieve more detailed studies of cultural relations with other



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regions and to determine the place of the site in the regional chronological table of the chalcolithic period, the following questions are raised: Drawing on the existing cultural material such as pottery from Yatag Tepesi, to which cultural period(s) is the site datable? The most plausible hypothesis that can be advanced in this respect is that the site is related to the Middle Chalcolithic (LC1) and late Chalcolithic (LC2 3) periods. Judging by the recovered material, with which regions did the site maintained greater interactions? The comparative studies of the finds in the collected assemblage is suggestive of the fact that the site local inhabitants had close ties and shared strong affinities with other regions in northwest Iran, particularly the Qaradagh region and the Lake Urmia basin, as well as South Caucasia (Bakhtiari *et al.*,2017).

An Outline of the Finds

Test excavations were carried out at Barzand Ghalasi aiming at determining the core and buffer zones of the central citadel and its surroundings. A total of 11 soundings were opened on a hump that is introduced here by the name of Yatagh Tepesi. The second period in the recorded sequence for the site represents the middle Chalcolithic (LC1) (Figure. 2)

and the late Chalcolithic (LC2 3) (Figure. 3) periods based on the recovered small finds, including pottery, lithic and obsidian tools, a ground stone, and a mortar. According to the preliminary analyses, the early Chalcolithic period (Dalma culture) is totally absent at Yatag Tepesi. The major datable finds from the site include the pottery. The recovered pieces are all handmade, characterized by a generally smooth and polished surface. Vessels occur in various forms such as shallow bowls, large bowls, storage jars, large (open mouth) cooking pots, and beakers. No traces of painted pottery occur. The latest locus produced a fragment that appears to have been a base of a cooking pot/vat (Figure. 4) (Mohammadi, 2018). With a diameter of 31 cm, the fragment is one of a kind. On the basis of ethnographic evidence, open mouth vessels are related with storing dry materials and items. Therefore, the subsistence system of the Chalcolithic inhabitants of the site probably relied on agricultural crops. The presence of stone tools such as mortar and pestle could provide further evidence for agricultural activities, while the discovery of animal bones and hooves as well as a cow figurine may likewise evince a pastoral community (Alizadeh,2002; 2003).

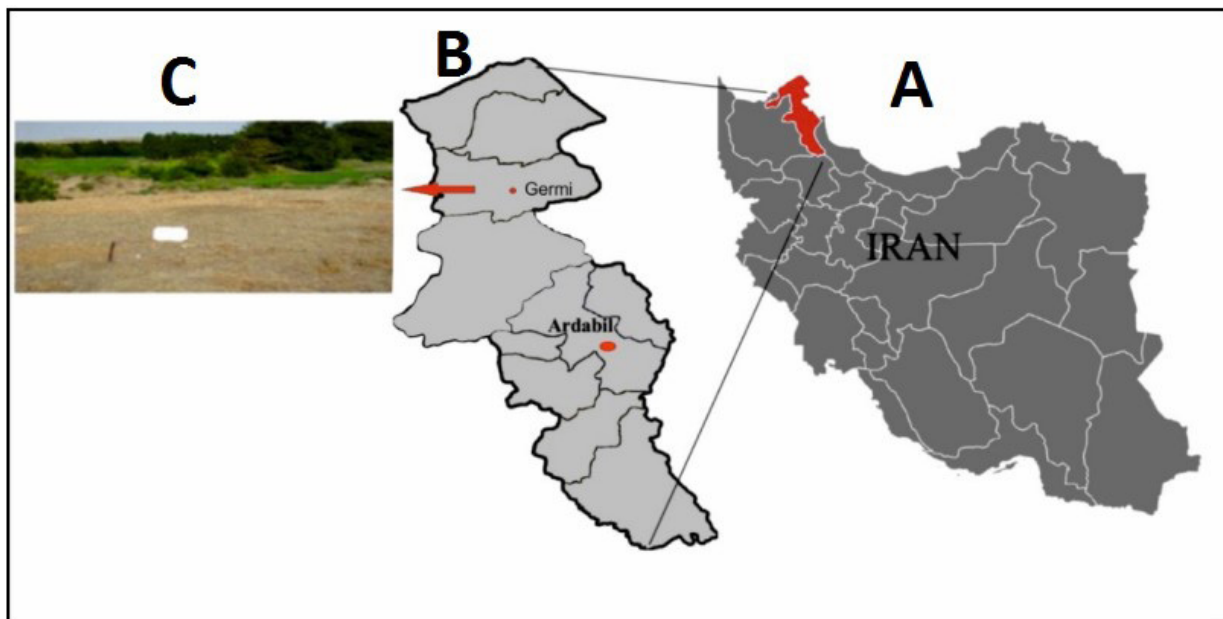


Figure. 1: A: Map showing the location of Ardabil province in Iran .

B: Location of Germi County in Ardabil province.

C: General view of Yatag tepesi .

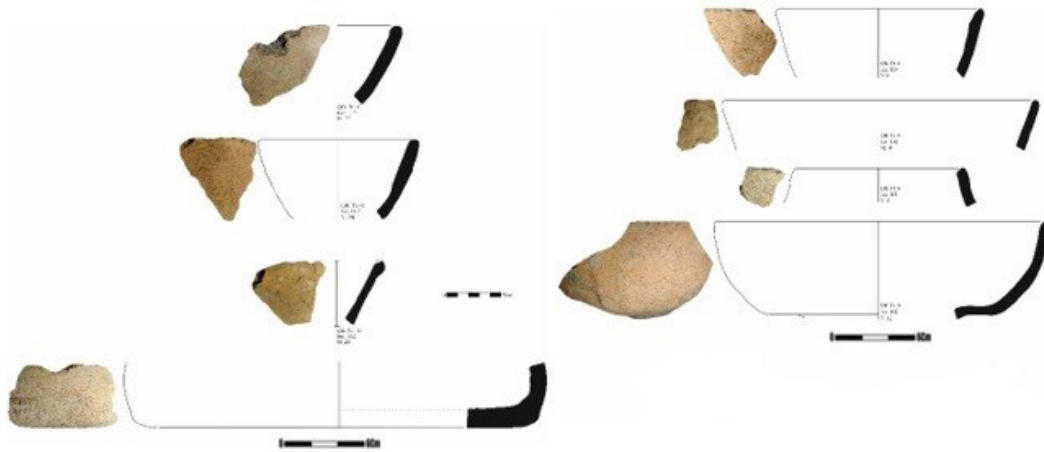


Figure 2: Middle Chalcolithic pottery from Yatag Tepesi (Mohammadi, 2018)

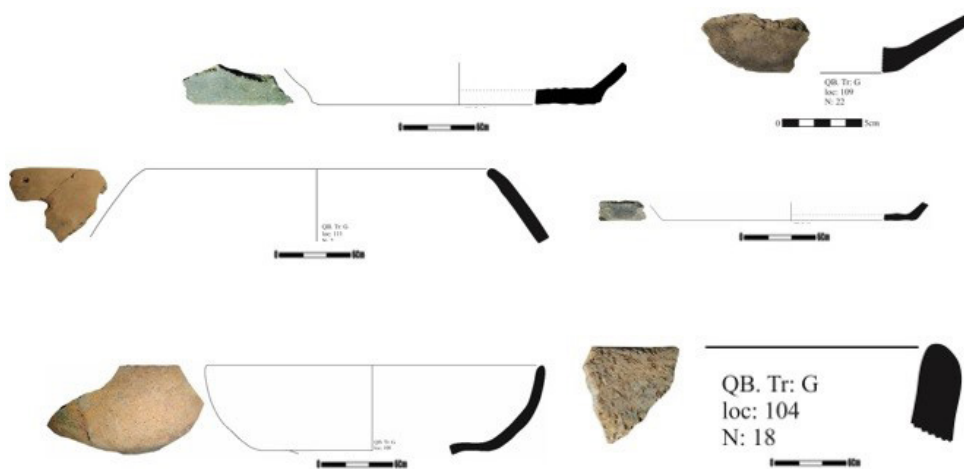


Figure 3: Late Chalcolithic pottery from Yatag Tepesi (Mohammadi, 2018)



Figure 4: Cooking pot/vat from Yatag Tepesi (Mohammadi, 2018)

Conclusions

In the excavated exposures two cultural periods were identified at Yatag Tepesi, the second of which relate to the Middle Chalcolithic (LC1) and Late Chalcolithic (LC2–3). The recorded pottery is invariably handmade, and the exterior is normally smoothed and polished. Vessels come in a variety of shapes, including both open and closed forms, though the open variety is more common. Judging from large and small hooves among the faunal remains, ceramic figurine probably depicting a cattle, tools such as a ground stone, a mortar and similar tools that are typically found in settlement sites, and the presence of indications of straw in all

the excavated layers down to virgin soil the site can be interpreted as a seasonal-pastoral settlement. The cultural material from the site belongs to the Middle chalcolithic/Pizdeli/LC1 and the late Chalcolithic/LC2–3 period and the chaff-faced pottery horizon. This timespan (middle and late Chalcolithic) is generally known in northwestern Iran as Hasanlu Period VIII (Hamlin, 1975: 111), which is dated on the basis of radiocarbon dates from Dava Goz III (Abedi, 2016) and Kul Tepe VII (Abedi *et al.*, 2014) (Abedi, 2016) and other concomitant prehistoric sites (Abedi, 2017) (Ali Beigi *et al.*, 2014) (Hesari, 2005) (Hesari, 2019) (Bakhshaliyev and Seyidov, 2013) (relative chronology) between 4500–4200 BCE.

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