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Burial Practices in Bronze Age Gohar Tepe and Neighboring Areas: A Comparative Study

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Abstract: Archaeological evidence from the Paleolithic to the Iron Age in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea indicates a fundamental change in the structure of life of the people in these areas during this successive period. One of the most important changes that took place in the societies of this region during the Bronze Age (urbanization) compared to the previous period is the changes in burial traditions. The burials from this period contain rich information about the social, economic and cultural structures of these communities. No studies of bronze age burials have yet been carried out in the region. Remains of graves and similar burial practices in the area also indicate cultural influences and similarities in the area. The presence of similar grave goods among the graves in this area suggests that the similar function of these objects is considered for the deceased. In this study, we have tried to use Parsons' structural-functionalist framework of thought to gain a better understanding of the level of social classes in Gohar Tepe society and analyses its social system based on the objects discovered in the burials. Other objectives of this study are burial traditions and cultural influences between the southern and southeastern Caspian Sea sites and adjacent areas. Despite the numerous problems in this study, the results indicate a similar burial tradition for the deceased in this cultural area. Comparative studies of grave goods and burial traditions also indicate cultural influence and the existence of a community with different class levels in the study areas.

Keywords: Bronze Age, Gohar Tepe, Burial Tradition, Parsons structural-functionalist

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Currently, the Gohar Tepe site is one of the largest Bronze Age sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea, discovered in 2000-2002. This site lies in the middle of a triangle linking Paleolithic sites (Daray-e Shoresheh), Epipaleolithic and Neolithic sites (Hotu, Kamarband, Komishan Caves) and the Initial Village settlement (Tough Tepe, Chehl-Din Site). Therefore, the developmental path of these cultures from the Paleolithic to the end of the urbanization period can be studied in this limited triangle (Mahfrouzi, 2000: 1) (Fig. 1). Considering that the Bronze Age in the southern and southeastern basins of the Caspian Sea, which includes Gohar Tepe, has always been confronted with many ambiguities, the importance of basic research in this area during this period is doubled. At present, with the results of the absolute chronology of the Gohar Tepe cultural layers, a significant contribution to this area rich in cultural artefacts can be made with greater certainty to clarify the cultural, social and economic status of the Bronze Age communities in the southern cultural field and southeast of the Caspian Sea. For this reason, the graves of Gohar Tepe in the Bronze Age are among the most important sources of information in terms of organization and social classification. This study attempts to reconstruct the social structure of this area by examining the grave goods, which in some way contain the material and spiritual culture of the inhabitants of Gohar Tepe and the burial traditions in the Bronze Age and consider its cultural impact with other sites in neighboring areas.



The Gohar Tepe site is considered one of the Bronze Age sites in the south-eastern part of the Caspian Sea. After the Chalcolithic period, the developments of the initial urbanization period can be seen in the remains of the inhabitants of this site, such as changes in the structure of architecture, burial

traditions, the metal industry and pottery, which are directly related to the structure of a society in prehistoric period. Another influential development for the existence of similar regional and supra-regional cultures is the increase in trade and exchange systems during this period, which is evident in the material remains of the inhabitants. The graves of Gohar Tepe and the objects left by them contain a great deal of information about the structure of an urban community in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea. When examining graves, these questions can be asked by looking at all the structures of a society at the initial urbanization period and comparing them with the sites of the neighboring areas what was the predominant burial tradition in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea and surrounding sites in the Bronze Age? And also:

Is the Bronze Age society of Gohar Tepe a class society? And what cultural similarities are there between the burial patterns in the Gohar Tepe site and the contemporaneous sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea and the sites in neighboring areas? And the hypotheses are: The predominant mode of burial in the south and southeast of the Caspian and in the adjacent areas in the Bronze Age was that collected to the right east or south. Also, the data obtained from the burial of Gohar Tepe and other simultaneous sites south and southeast of the Caspian Sea indicate the existence of a class society and a complex social structure in this area. The data from the burial at Gohar Tepe and other contemporaneous sites south and southeast of the Caspian Sea also indicate the existence of a class society and a complex social structure in this area.

The common burial patterns in the Gohar Tepe site and the contemporaneous sites south and southeast of the Caspian Sea (Shah Tepe, Narges Tepe and Tepe Hissar), as well as the sites of the adjacent areas, indicate the cultural influences and impacts between these areas.

Research Method

Research Method This study is based on two main methods: The first is documentary study, which includes a first-hand study of the excavations of Gohar Tepe and library studies. The second method of reconstructing the social structure of Gohar Tepe is based on the theory of structural functionalism.

Geographical Location of Gohar Tepe

The site of Gohar Tepe is situated on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, on the east coast of Mazandaran, in the Behshahr Plain, two kilometers north-west of Rostam Kala, between the cities of Neka to the west and Behshahr to the east, at longitude 36 degrees, 40 minutes and 43 seconds and latitude 36 degrees, 24 minutes and 03 seconds (Mahfrouzi, 2003: 538). The cities of Neka and Behshahr lie in the east of the province of Mazandaran, bordering the Caspian Sea to the north, the northern slopes of the Alborz to the south, the city of Kordkuy to the east and the city of Sari to the west. The site of Gohar Tepe, with an area of about 50 hectares, comprises 6 small and large mounds adjoining each other. It is distinguished from the flat agricultural land by the steep slopes of the northern and western slopes and the relatively gentle slopes of the southern and eastern slopes. The height of this hill is 32 meters above sea level (Mahfrouzi, 2000-2003:11) (Fig 2-4).

Chronology and Stratigraphy of Gohar Tepe

The Gohar Tepe excavations were carried out in 2002 with the aim of determining the buffer zone (Delimiting) and the stratigraphy of part of it (Fig.5-7). As shown in the chronological table provided by the excavator of the site, based on the carbon-14 samples and the results, it can be assumed that the first occupation of the site belonged to the Late Chalcolithic period (Gohar Tepe I). The developments of the urbanization period can also be traced through evidence from the Bronze Age at the site.



Figure 2: Geographical location of the study area (WWW.USGS.GOV)



Figure 3: Geographical location of the study area(Google Earth)



Figure 4: Aerial photo of Gohar Tepe(Google Earth)

Remaining evidence from the Late Bronze Age (2800-3400 BC) includes architectural remains, including compacted clay and stone foundations, as well as the existence of 6 burials in the residential context of this period (Gohar Tepe II). Only one example of a broken, bright black earthenware vessel (probably flagon) was found from the graves of this period. In the Middle Bronze Age (2200-2800 BC) (Gohar Tepe III1 and III2), the area of Gohar Tepe, covering a period of 600 years, reaches its maximum (about 50 hectares). Architectural remains found include a brick wall, pivot, hearth and oven (Fig. 8). A large amount of data belongs to the New Bronze age (1750-2200 BC, Gohar Tepe IV). 30 Burials were found on Middle Bronze Age layers. Industrial structures include pottery kilns, metal smelting furnaces outside residential areas, including settlements from this period. In this period new forms of pottery, such as thuribles with different shapes, are seen (Fig. 9), also red pottery is seen in the graves at the end of this period. In this period, the decanters form the largest container in the structure of the graves. According to the excavator, there is no evidence of an Iron Age I period after the New Bronze Age, and it is likely that the inhabitants of Gohar Tepe were nomadic or semi- sedentary during the 200-year period (1550-1750 BC) after the New Bronze Age. It was permanently inhabited and was probably used as a cemetery by the inhabitants of Iron Age II and III (Table 1).Based on the material evidence from the Bronze Age (especially the Middle Bronze Age), it seems that the cultural trends of the 3rd millennium to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC had a relatively similar situation in the geography of the Damghan and Shahrood Plains, the eastern Mazandaran Plain, the Gorgan Plain and western Turkmenistan (west of Eshq Abad) Therefore, in order to understand the impact and regional impressions, it is possible to examine the grave goods and burial methods of the Gohar Tepe site and compare it with other sites in the south and southeast of the Mazandaran Sea, such as some sites in the plain. Gorgan, Turkmenistan and Semnan, so that the comparative study of this research can be carried out in a logical and correct way, and finally a comparative table of the chronology of the sites was presented. (Table 2).



Figure 5: Stratification borehole in the Gohar Tepe (Gohar Tepe museum site)



Figure 6: 3D view of Gohar Tepe hillocks(Gohar Tepe museum site)

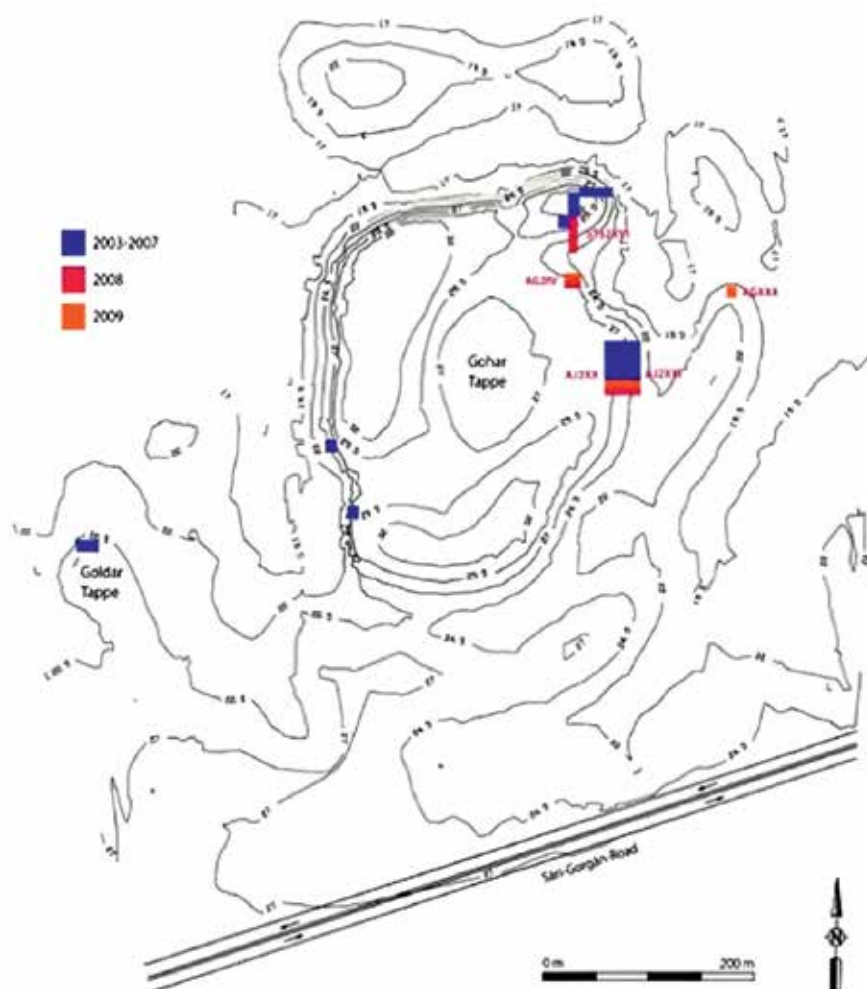


Figure 7: Location of the excavate trench on the Gohar Tepe (Piller and Mahfrouzi, 2009: 2)



Figure 8: Bronze Age kiln in Gohar Tepe (Gohar Tepe museum site)



Figure 9: Thurible (Gohar Tepe museum site)

Table 1: Chronology of Gohar Tepe (Mahfrouzi, 2003)

Chronology of Gohar Tepe		
Period		Number of deceased in each period
Iron Age III	VII	About 160 burials
Iron Age II	VI	
Iron Age I?	V	
The 200-year nomad and semi-permanent transitional period of 1500-1750 BC	IV2	
Late Bronze Age 2200-1750 BC	Gohar Tepe IV1	Burial No. 11 to 30
Middle Bronze Age 2800-2200 BC	Gohar Tepe III1-III2	Burial No. 7 to 10
Early bronze age 3400-2800 BC	Gohar Tepe II	Burial No. 1 to 6
Chalcolithic	Gohar Tepe I	

Table 2: Chronology of the Sites adjacent to Gohar Tepe (Moradi, 2013: 16)

Period	Chronology of the Sites adjacent to Gohar Tepe							
Early bronze age	Gohar Tepe II 3400-2800 BC	Shah Tepe III3200-2800 BC	Narges Tepe IIIc 3500-2900 BC	Turang Tepe III2150-1885 BC	Hissar II 3365-3030 BC	Altyn 8-4 3000-2600 BC	Namazgah IV2800-2300 BC	Parkhai cemetery (Parkhai II) first half of the third millennium BC
Middle Bronze Age	Gohar Tepe III 2800-2200 BC	Shah Tepe IIb2800-2200 BC	Narges Tepe IIIb 2900-2600 BC		Hissar IIIb 2640- 2390 BC	Altyn 3-1 2600-2200 BC	Namazgah V2200-1850 BC	
Late Bronze Age	Gohar Tepe IV 2200-1750 BC	Shah Tepe IIa1,2(second half of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium BC)	Narges Tepe IIIa 2500-1700 BC	Turang Tepe IIIc2170-1900 BC	Hissar IIIc 2150- 1885 BC		Namazgah VI1350-1000 BC	

Bronze Age Archaeology of Gohar Tepe

In the Bronze Age, cultural and technological, social and economic processes spread faster than in the previous period (Chalcolithic). In this period, the cultural patterns from before the Chalcolithic are gradually replaced by new patterns (Talai, 2009: 65). The site of Gohar Tepe is a landmark in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea in the Bronze Age and is no exception. Bronze Age finds in the area include the main artifacts from this period in Gohar Tepe, their burials and various dates, pottery, lithic tools, bone tools for spinning, clay and stone figures, kiln, brick and stone(foundation) architecture, remains of potter's wheels and metal smelting furnaces were mentioned. Most of the grave goods are made of pottery. Pottery attributed to this period is often gray in color with proper firing and they are delicate in construction, the clay is fully kneaded and they have a thick gray glaze. Based on the material evidence from the Bronze Age (especially the Middle Bronze Age), it seems that the cultural

flows of the third millennium to the middle of the second millennium BC had a relatively similar situation in the geography of the Damghan and Shahroud Plains, the eastern Mazandaran Plains, the Gorgan Plains and western Turkmenistan (west of Ashgabat). Therefore, in order to understand the regional impact and consequences, it is possible to study the burial objects and burial methods in the Gohar Tepe site and compare them with other sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea. In this context, some areas in the plain of Gorgan (Shah Tepe, Turang Tepe and Narges Tepe) and Semnan (Tepe Hissar) have been studied as landmarks of this period, which have the least connecting route with Gohar Tepe, as well as three sites in the south of Turkmenistan (Altyn Depe, Namazgah and Parkhai cemetery) (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: The connection path between Gohar Tepe site and other sites(Moradi,2014)

Theoretical Foundations: Talcott Parsons School of Functionalism and Structural Functionalism

As mentioned earlier, the method used to analyze this study and understand the social structure and classes of Gohar Tepe's Bronze Society is based on the sociological schools of functionalism and Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism.

Functionalism, in its broadest sense, is an approach to describing societies and cultures that is concerned with the functional relationship between different elements in society or the relationship between the functioning of society as a whole and its wider environment. Functionalist debates are often concerned with explaining a particular social phenomenon by emphasizing its role in maintaining society as a particular institution. In this theory, society is considered as a whole, and changes in one element of society lead to changes in society as a whole. Functionalist hypotheses also form the basis of a descriptive and explanatory approach to general systems theory and are integral to cultural systems

and systems (Shaw & Jamison, 1999: 244,245). In the school of functionalism, cultural phenomena and mechanisms are studied in terms of their function in the system as a whole (Alizadeh, 2004: 256). In such a view, function means various solutions that the system can use to adapt to survival conditions (to maintain its excellence and its development), and involves new concepts of functionalism, because the view does not focus on the analysis of cultural or social elements, but its starting point is "society", which examines both the whole society and its components. (Vosoughi, 1990: 243-246). Renfrew also points out that ancient society must necessarily be viewed from a practical perspective in order to examine the relationships between cultural subsystems (Fagan, 2006: 703). We have used this theory in recognizing the function and performance and classifying the material remains of graves.

Functionalists believe that cultural works and structures should be explained and classified based on their application (Dark, 2008: 252). Of course, the objects in the graves had a somewhat different function than during the lifetime of the deceased. The most important function, besides the consumption of some objects, is the burials or ritual function and, to some extent, the hidden function of these material remains. For the function of these objects can only be considered from a ritual point of view, and the reason for this is that we do not know how the people of the past behaved in terms of their practical conduct towards the dead and how they thought about customs and rituals, rites and the world after death. There is also no uniform method for arranging these objects around the deceased, taking into account their nature and material, and especially their use. Perhaps the meaning of these objects in terms of the function that is designed for them, can be expressed in such a way that in graves with the object, the type and number of graves compared to each other can be a diagram of social differences, in terms of the rich or the poverty of the deceased, the role and position of people in this society.

The second and most important theory used in this study is Parsons' theory of structural functionalism, which has had the greatest part in the development of sociological theory (Roche, 1997: 12-1). Parsons was the first to define the structural-functional combination method and to use it in his work (Tavasoli, 2000: 186). In line with his theory, he claims that this theoretical framework can encompass and analyze all human and structural realities in the social world (Craib, 2007: 51). If one considers society as a functional system, then according to Parsons its constituent elements are roles, but the functions of the institution of society are constantly changing, and that means that a society can change and undergo structural changes. Just as the deceased adopted patterns and norms during his life as a member of society, his role as the most important social element will continue after death. For example, there may have been graves full of burial objects belonging to people with higher social status, which the deceased maintained this social status after death. The establishment of graves and cemeteries also points to the importance of this functional role that the deceased has after death. For this reason, the function and role played by the institutions of society for him at the time of his death are different and distinct from the time when he lived. Similar burial traditions, widespread as a social phenomenon and cultural model since the Bronze Age, as well as common geographical spaces called cemeteries, have confirmed the structural changes in society and the application of these social norms in this period. The type of burial, the place where the deceased was buried, the type of architecture and grave goods, and the like, represent a combination of different system components in the formation of a social phenomenon that are interrelated, and the change of any one of these elements will lead to changes in the entire system. For example, the change in the tradition of burial on the ground of dwellings in the Bronze Age has led to the formation of cemetery areas outside the site, and as a result, changes in the architecture of the grave and so on.

Also in terms of structure, Parsons views society as a system made up of various components and believes that each of these components has a role and function in the survival and structure of the

system; functionally, he compares society to a biological system and believes: All living systems have a tendency to equilibrium and to a stable, balanced relationship between the various components and to differentiation from other systems. Meanwhile, the function of some parts is so important to the system that without the function of some of its most important elements and components, society loses its integrity and coherence and is unable to continue. Just as in the body of a living being the heart, the brain and the nervous system play a vital role in the survival of that living being, the presence of some functions in society is necessary. This can be seen in the graves. It is possible that the variety of objects in the graves is different, but it has a minimum. If the grave is considered a living system, the skeleton is the heart and center of the grave, whose existence causes other objects to be placed in the grave. The room in which the skeleton and the objects are placed is also one of the most important subsystems of this system. Of course, the type of architectural structure is very effective for the social ranking of people in the grave. It should not be forgotten that there is not only a systematic order within a grave, but that this order can also be seen between the graves of a cemetery. In general, the understanding of burial traditions and methods can be distinguished from the number of graves.

Burial Patterns of Bronze Age Gohar Tepe and Neighboring Sites

Of the 200 graves found in the Gohar Tepe area, 40 graves belong to the Bronze Age. The remaining evidence of the behavior of the living in relation to the dead at Gohar Tepe during the Bronze Age indicates the use of various burial methods in the Bronze Age. The burial methods used in all eras are under the floor of residential areas, a simple oval pit, and jar burial, enclosed in mud-brick (Fig. 11 -12) .The type of burial of all the deceased in all eras is the fetal type (collected on the left or right side). The graves from the old Bronze Age (2800-3400 BC) were recovered from the soil of residential areas and, according to the dating (carbon 14), belong to the year 3400 BC (Mahfuzi,2010: 29) (Diagram 1) .These burials fall in the same period as the first period of architecture in the site of Gohar Tepe. The predominant method of placing the deceased in the grave in the ancient Bronze Age is fetal and gathered on the left side, with the head placed in different directions. 50% of the deceased were facing north (Diagram 1-2). The graves of the Middle Bronze Age differ from those of the preceding period (Early Bronze Age) by the structure of the graves. A total of 4 burials belong to the Middle Bronze Age, of which only one burial was buried in the residential area in the manner of the previous period, and the oldest burial is from the Middle Bronze Age (Fig 13). All deceased in this period are adults, the body position in the grave is on the left side (100%) for all of them and the head is laid in different directions. The most common orientation of the deceased in this period is towards the west. Considering the fact that during the Bronze Age the long-standing tradition of burying the dead on the ground of the residential areas was abandoned and the dead were buried outside the residential area, it can be pointed out that in the society of the Middle Bronze Age the immaterial culture (thoughts and traditions of the society) probably developed much slower than the material changes (technology), that is, there was a cultural delay in the Middle Bronze Age society. The remaining graves from this period were probably moved outside the residential area due to limited settlement.

At this time the area of Gohar Tepe is more than 40 hectares. An abundance of ornaments can be seen in the Middle Bronze Age tombs at Gohar Tepe and neighboring sites. Among the graves of this period there is only one that has no jewelry, and the interesting thing is the abundance of jewelry in the graves of this period, which probably belong to women. This may indicate the continuation of a similar technology and cultural and social system in the Middle Bronze Age society of Gohar Tepe and its neighboring sites.

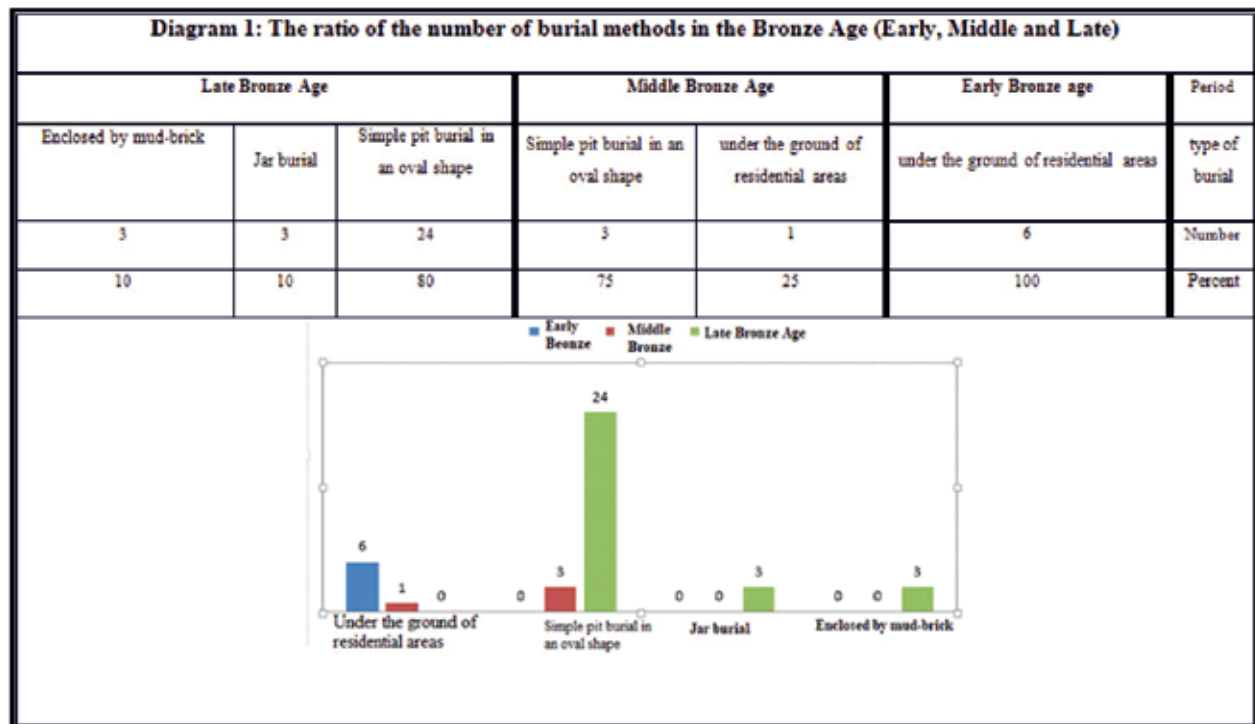


Diagram 1: The ratio of the number of burial methods in the Bronze Age (Early, Middle and Late)

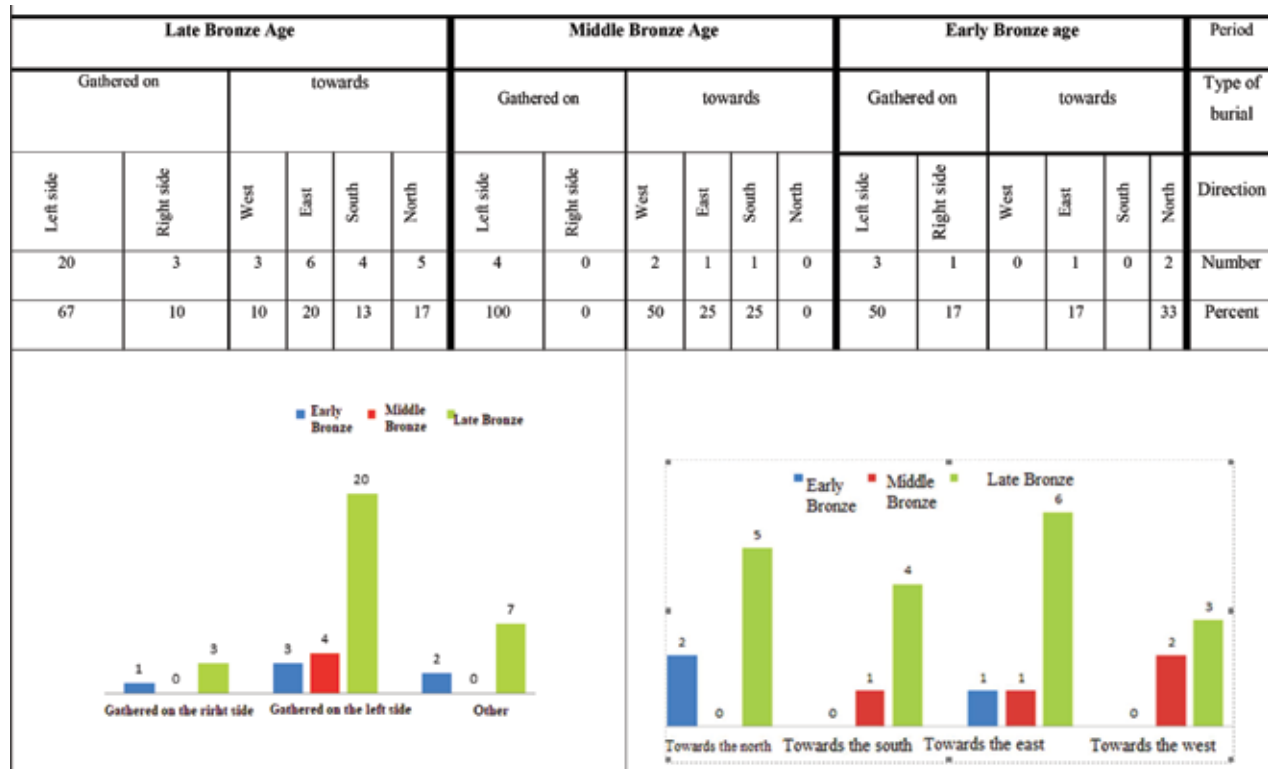


Diagram 2: The position of the heads and bodies of the deceased Gohar Tepe in the Bronze Age (Early, Middle and Late)

The graves of the Late Bronze Age can be divided into two categories on the basis of the grave goods present: rich and poor. A total of 25 graves have objects and 5 graves have no objects. In the Early and Middle Bronze Age, the methods of burial of the deceased were limited to two types (under the

ground of residential areas, a simple pit), while in this period new methods of burial were introduced in relation to the deceased. A total of 3 methods of burying the deceased were used during this period. The tradition of burying the deceased under the floors of the residential areas is completely outdated in this period, and the most common way of burying the deceased is a simple pit (83%). 67% of the deceased were placed on the left side and 20% of the deceased on the north side (Diagram 2). The presence of weapons in the structure of a grave is another development from this period (grave no. 22) (Fig 14). A two-person burial is also seen for the first time (Fig 15). Jar burials and graves surrounded by mud-brick are two new traditions related to the burials of this period. The Jar burials all belong to infants and children. Obvious is the presence of new forms of pottery in the tombs filled with grave goods. 71% of the pottery is made of decanters. In the structure of the tombs of this period, the variety of pottery forms in the rich graves is striking compared to other periods. In general, the cultural changes in the Bronze Age at the Gohar Tepe site can be seen in the burial methods in each of the periods (early, Middle, and Late), including the architecture of the grave, the placement of the deceased, and the dates of the graves. In the early Bronze Age, a method can be seen in the architecture of the grave and the burial of the deceased (under the floor of residential areas). This practice continues in the early Middle Bronze Age with simple oval pit graves outside of residential areas. In this period, which coincides with the size of the area of Gohar Tepe, various forms of pottery are seen in different types.

In the funerary architecture of the New Bronze Age we also find two new methods in funerary architecture, the presence of two burials, new pottery forms and the appearance of spout vessels in new forms. The last changes in the structure of the graves are the presence of red pottery and the decrease of gray pottery, which can be observed at the end of the New Bronze Age of Gohar Tepe.

Data Uncovered from Graves

The material remains from the Bronze Age graves at Gohar Tepe include pottery, stone and metal objects. Changes and transformations at the level of Gohar Tepe society in each of the Bronze Ages (Early, Middle and late) can be analyzed on the basis of the grave goods.



Figure 11: Simple pit burial(Gohar Tepe museum site)



Figure 12: Jar burial (Gohar Tepe museum site)



Figure 13: A burial belonging to the Middle Bronze Age (Gohar Tepe Museum site)

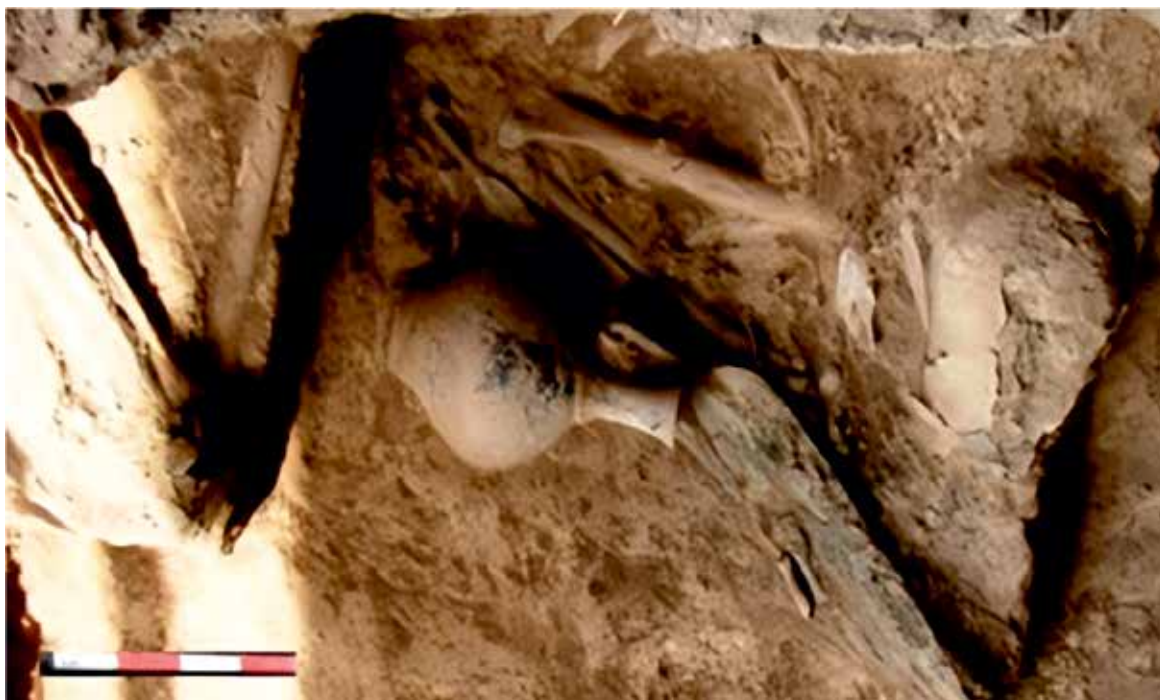


Figure 14: Grave No. 22(Gohar Tepe Museum site)



Figure 15: A grave with two burials(Gohar Tepe Museum site)

1. Pottery

Pottery is the most common part of the objects in the graves of Gohar Tepe. The way the pottery is placed next to the deceased indicates that the distribution of the grave goods does not follow any particular order. Pottery vessels were sometimes placed on the head, behind the head, in front of the face and beside the feet. The number of containers in the graves is also numerous. There are different types of vessels, including decanters (simple, with handles and spouts), bowls (simple and with gutter pipe), goblets, cups and incense burners (Censer) with an approximate size between 25 and 33 cm (AzamZadeh, 2006: 108). One of the characteristic features of the pottery of this region is















































































































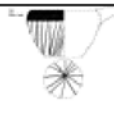


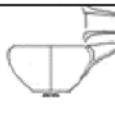


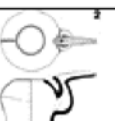
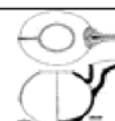
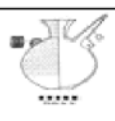


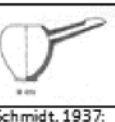

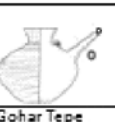






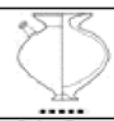



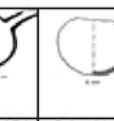
Potteries									
Decanter with a handle					Bowl		Cup	Goblet	Thurible
Plain					with a spout	Plain	Cutter spout		
									
									
									
									
									
									
									
									
									
									
									

Figure 16: Potteries placed in tombs, Bronze Age, Gohar Tepe(Gohar Tepe Museum site)

the presence of a grey background color. These potteries are completely polished and shiny, and it is not clear whether these stained patterns have a decorative or a practical aspect (to enhance the strength of the pottery) (Talai, 2011: 233). Also, the characteristic pottery of this period has made it possible to identify relative temporal and spatial relationships (Chaichi, 2004: 83). In the Early Bronze Age, the only object left from the graves is a simple pottery decanter (carafe) (Fig. 16). Decanters found in graves come in three types: simple, with a handle and with a spout. In everyday life these vessels are used for drinking and transporting liquids. The presence of this type of vessel in graves may indicate its ritual function along with the liquid that was buried with the deceased. Among the clay vessels found in Middle Bronze Age tombs are decanters, which make up half of the pottery of this period (50 per cent). Most of them are simple decanters. The decanters and bowls found are most similar to Hissar III and among the potteries of the new bronze graves of Gohar Tepe are spout vessels; In the third millennium, the use of spout vessels spread widely in Iran, and for some inexplicable reason, the use of spout vessels in Iran became obsolete at the beginning of the second millennium BC (1800 BC) (Hissar IIIC and Shah Tepe II). After about 300 years, it became popular again in 1500 BC (Talai, 1994: 12). According to Haerinck, the production of this type of vessel was popular in the northeastern region of Iran from the Bronze Age to the Parthian period (Haerinck, 2006: 200) (Table 3).

Table 3: Typological comparison of some tomb pottery (Moradi, 2013)

1				6		
	Gohar Tepe	Arne, 1945: 203, Fig: 406 (Shah Tepe)	Abbasi, 2011: 124 (Narges Tepe)		Gohar Tepe	Abbasi, 2011: 111, Fig. 143
2				7		
	Gohar Tepe	Abbasi, 2011: 111, fig. 139 (Narges Tepe)	Abbasi, 2011: 122, fig. 203 (Narges Tepe)		Gohar Tepe	Arne, 1945: 184, Fig: No: 752 (Shah Tepe)
						Abbasi, 2011: 132, fig. 247 (Narges Tepe)
3				8		
	Gohar Tepe	Schmidt, 1937: Pl: 216, H2773 (Hissar Tepe)	Arne, 1945: 308, Fig: 364 (Shah Tepe)		Gohar Tepe	Arne, 1945: 198, No: 392 (Shah Tepe)
						Masson, 1981: 91, Pic: 27 Altyn Depe
4				9		
	Gohar Tepe	Schmidt, 1937: 261, No: 5040 (Hissar Tepe)	Arne, 1945: 184, fig: 352 (Shah Tepe)		Gohar Tepe	Arne, 1945: 308, Fig: 334 (Shah Tepe)
						Abbasi, 2011: 108, fig. 129 (Narges Tepe)
5				10		
	Gohar Tepe	Masson & Bereshkin, 2005: Pl: 67, No: 2 Altyn Depe	Schmidt, 1937: Pl: 181, No: 4098, (Hissar Tepe)		Gohar Tepe	Arne, 1945: 196, Fig: 386, No: 377 (Shah Tepe)
						Schmidt, 1937: Pl: XXXVIII, H 5089 (Hissar Tepe)
						Masson, 1956: 306, Fig: 10 Nemazgan

The structure of these vessels consists of six parts: Body, base, spout, mouth, drain and handle (Naghshineh, 2004: 35-36). This type of vessel from the Gohar Tepe site has an oval-shaped body. Part of the opening of the container is sometimes decorated with one or two rings. All these vessels have a suitable prolongation in height, length and body, following a general rule, and their open mouth indicates a similar use. In most cases, these vessels are without handles, necks and bases (Azam Zadeh, 2006: 107) (Fig 17).

In general, most gifts are found in the tombs of the New Bronze Age. Including decanters with handles (39%) and spouts (23%), which are associated with new changes compared to the previous period. Censers (incense burners) also appear for the first time in this period, they are usually found in graves filled with pottery dates, but they were also found in the site of Hissar from Periods I and II (Diagram 3).

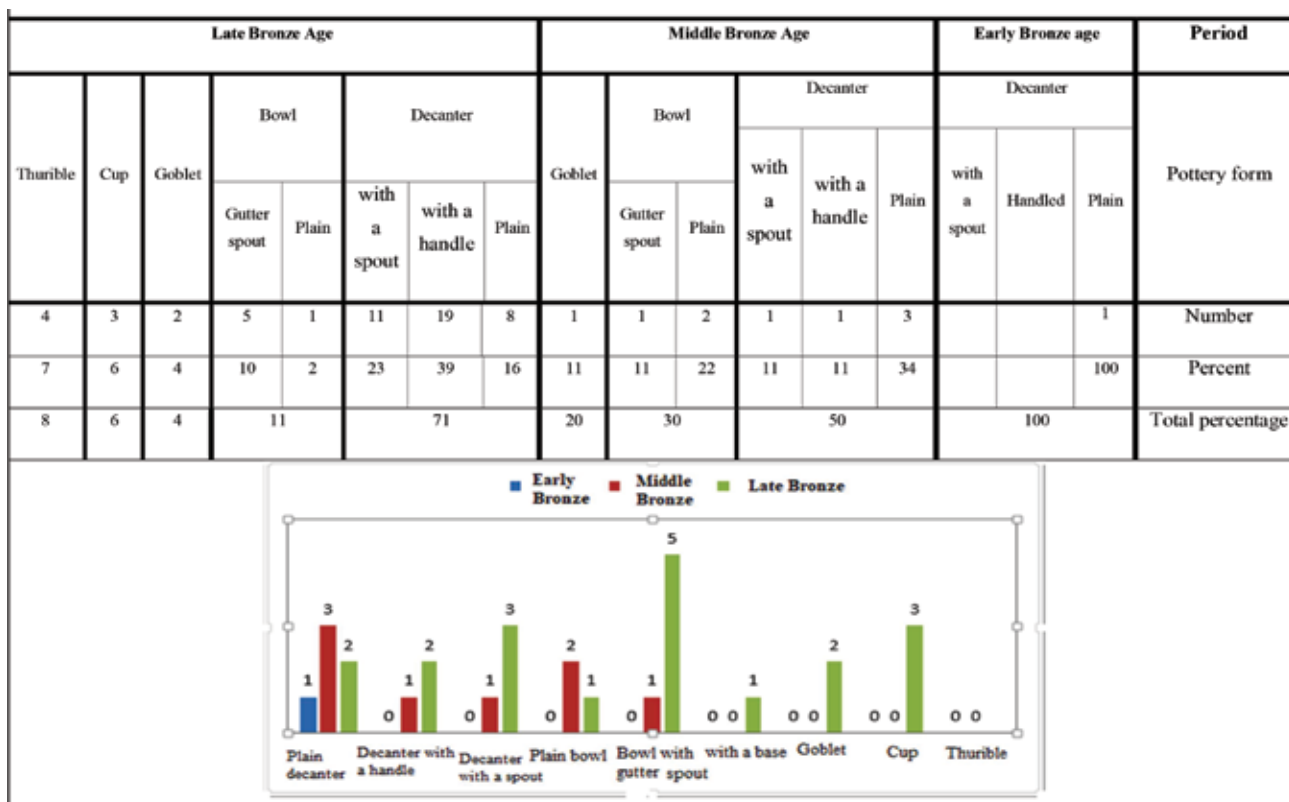


Diagram 3: The ratio of the number of types of grave pottery in the Bronze Age (Early, Middle and Late).

In earlier periods simple and handle-shaped decanters were seen in the graves, but in this period angular decanters are a new form of pottery technique (tradition) in this period. These containers were also found in graves full of gifts. Similar examples of this type of pottery have been found at sites in Gorgan, Semnan and Turkmenistan, especially in the Namazgah V period.

The appearance of buff, brown and red pottery is one of the other changes and developments in the structure of the graves at the end of this period. This is because at the end of this period, in addition to the grey pottery in the graves, there is also pottery with red and brown paste. This type of pottery is also found in neighboring sites, such as NargesTepeIIIa (Abbasi, 2011: 132-137), Hissar IIIC, (Schmidt, 2011: 254) and TurangTepe III (Deshayes, 1965, P: XXIII).

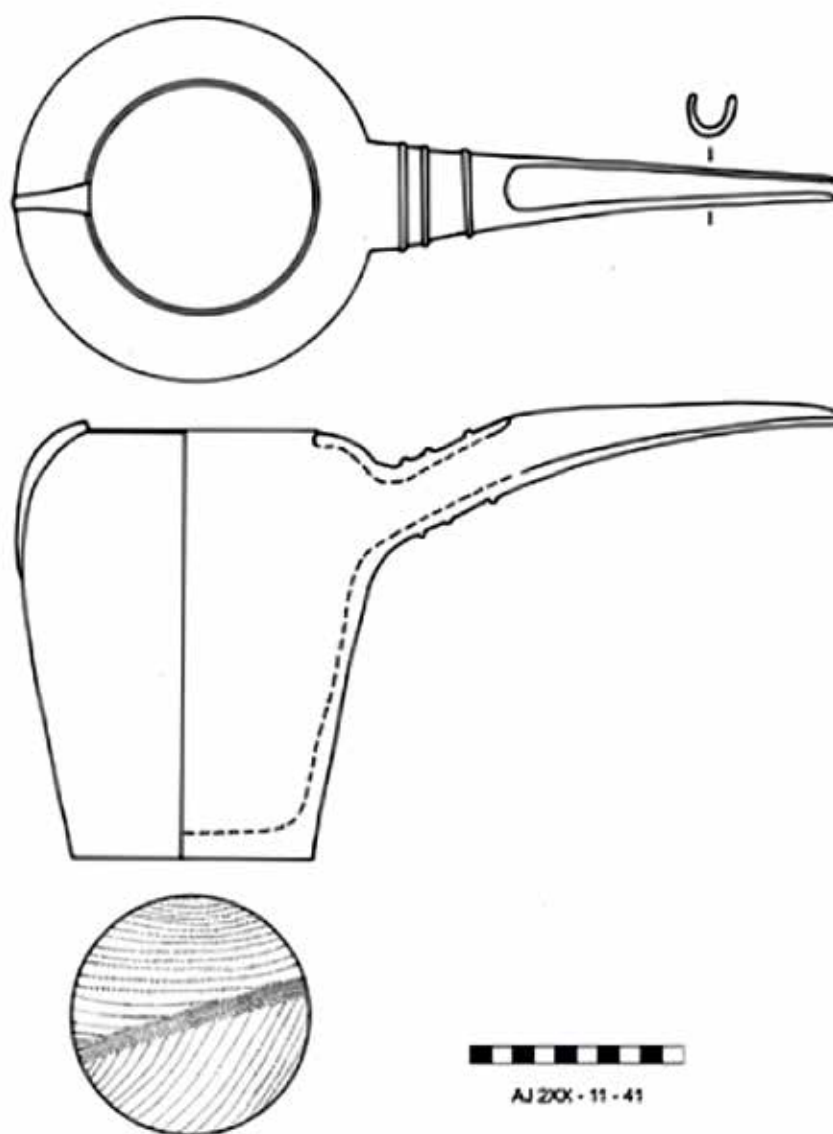














Figure 17: Structure of containers with a spout (Gohar Tepe Museum site)

2. Metal objects

In the 3rd to 1st millennia BC, the investigated area shows a very high concentration of bronze metal. The use of a large quantity of this metal is proof of the importance of the social and economic structure of the region. The more complex societies and the distance between social classes and the status of special groups led to a new development in the use of these materials. As far as access to metals is concerned, the main material for bronze (copper and tin) is not indigenous to the region, and the nearest center for it is the southern regions of Semnan province on the edge of the desert. Ghirshman also considers the tin mines in the Sahand Mountains and near Esterabad and Shahroud, and near Mount Zar at Damghan (Mahfrouzi et al, 2006: 136). Metal objects found in the graves include weapons and ornaments. A metal dagger and an arrow were identified. Both objects lie next to the hands of the deceased and are similar in shape to Hissar III (Schmidt, 1937: Pl: L) and AltynDepe (Masson & Berezkin, 2005) (Table 4).

Table 4: Typological comparison of metal objects from tomb (Moradi,2014: 67)

			
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)		Schmidt, 1937: Pl: IV, H 3564	
			
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)		Schmidt, 1937: Pl: IV, H 3564	Masson & Berezkin, 2005: Pl: 93, No: 1
			
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)		Schmidt, 1937: Pl: L 3855	Masson & Berezkin, 2005: Pl: 59, No: 10
			
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)	Schmidt, 1937: 244, Fig: 188	Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)	Masson & Berezkin, 2005: Pl: 98, N: 10. (
Arne, 1945: Pl: LXXVI, Shah Tepe (Bronze Age)			Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)

The oldest ornament discovered at the site is a bronze bracelet from the Middle Bronze Age. This bracelet was discovered in one of the middle bronze graves (grave no. 7) and belongs to a woman. Similar samples of this type were recovered from the tombs of Narges Tepe III b (Abbasi, 2011: 121) and Hissar III (Schmidt, 1937: Pl: IV) (Table 4). In the sites of the neighboring areas in this period (Middle Bronze) we also see an abundance of decorative objects in the graves. Examples include the rich women's graves at Hissar IIIB and IIIC, Narges Tepe IIIb and the noble area of Altyn Depe in the Middle Bronze Age (Seyed Sajjadi, 2007: 481). The largest number of pieces of jewelry (16 stone beads, earrings and rings) and the largest number of different types of pottery (bowls and decanters) were recovered from grave number 10 (Fig 18 and Table 4). A number of 4 earrings were recovered from graves, with comparable samples from Shah Tepe (Arne, 1945: 298), Narges Tepe IIIb (Abbasi, 2011: 121), Hissar III (Schmidt, 1937: Pl: IV) and Altyn Depe (Masson & Berezkin, 2005: Pl: 93, No: 1) (Table 4). Another surviving ornamental item is pins. The most common opinion about the use of pins is their use as hair ornaments, the so-called hairpins. Pins (bar pins) were mostly found in women's graves and next to the skulls of corpses. In some cases, pins were also found in men's graves and in places other than the skull (Mahfuzi, 2009: 7). The shape of the hairpins is spoon-shaped and made of bronze. In terms of shape, this hairpin is comparable to a similar specimen from Altyn Depe (Masson & Berezkin, 2005: Pl: 98, N: 10). In one of the children's graves from the Late Bronze Age

a decorative object (necklace plaque) can be seen. In terms of form, the decorative plaque found resembles a similar example from Hissar IIIB (Schmidt, 1937: 244) (Table 4).

Most of the decorative objects found in graves are stone beads (80%) (Table 4; Diagram 4). The difference between this grave and other graves of the Middle Bronze Age is evident in the number of grave goods and the presence of new pottery forms next to the deceased that the use of new forms in grave goods may be a diagram of the social and cultural system of society at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. In the older graves of this period, the forms of pottery objects were limited to decanters, goblets and bowls, but in the last grave of this period (grave no. 10) we encounter for the first time a vessel with a spout and a bowl with a gutter pipe, which did not exist in the periods before. Spout decanters are also found in Middle Bronze Age graves in the vicinity of Gohar Tepe, including Namazgah V and Altyn Depe 1-3. Gutter pipe bowls are also found in Narges Tepe IIb (Abbasi, 2010: 113-122) and Tepe Hissar IIIB (spout vessels are the characteristic vessels of Hissar III) and Shah Tepe IIb (Arne, 1945: 203), it is seen next to the deceased. In relation to the ornamental objects of this period, stone beads have the largest share (90 percent) among the other ornamental objects of the graves (Diagram 4).



Figure 18: Grave No. 10 (Gohar Tepe Museum site)

3. Stone Objects

Whorls, spindle whorls, stone discs and beads are among the stone objects found in graves. Decorative beads are the largest number of decorative objects. 16 Stone beads were recovered from Middle Bronze Age graves similar in shape to our Shah Tepe samples (Arne, 1945: Pl: LXXVI (Table 5). The beads found in the New Bronze Age graves are geometrically similar to beads from Shah Tepe (Arne, 1945: Pl: XXI), Narges Tepe IIc (Abbasi, 2010: 99), Tepe Hissar IIIB (Schmidt, 1937: 244) and a bead from Altyn Depe is similar (Masson and Berezhkin, 2005: Pl: 98, N: 13) (Table 5). Another example of a New Bronze Age bead is a lapis lazuli stone bead similar in shape to examples of beads found at Narges Tepe IIb (Abbasi, 2010: 114), Hissar III (Schmidt, 1931: Pl: CXLIII) (Table 5).

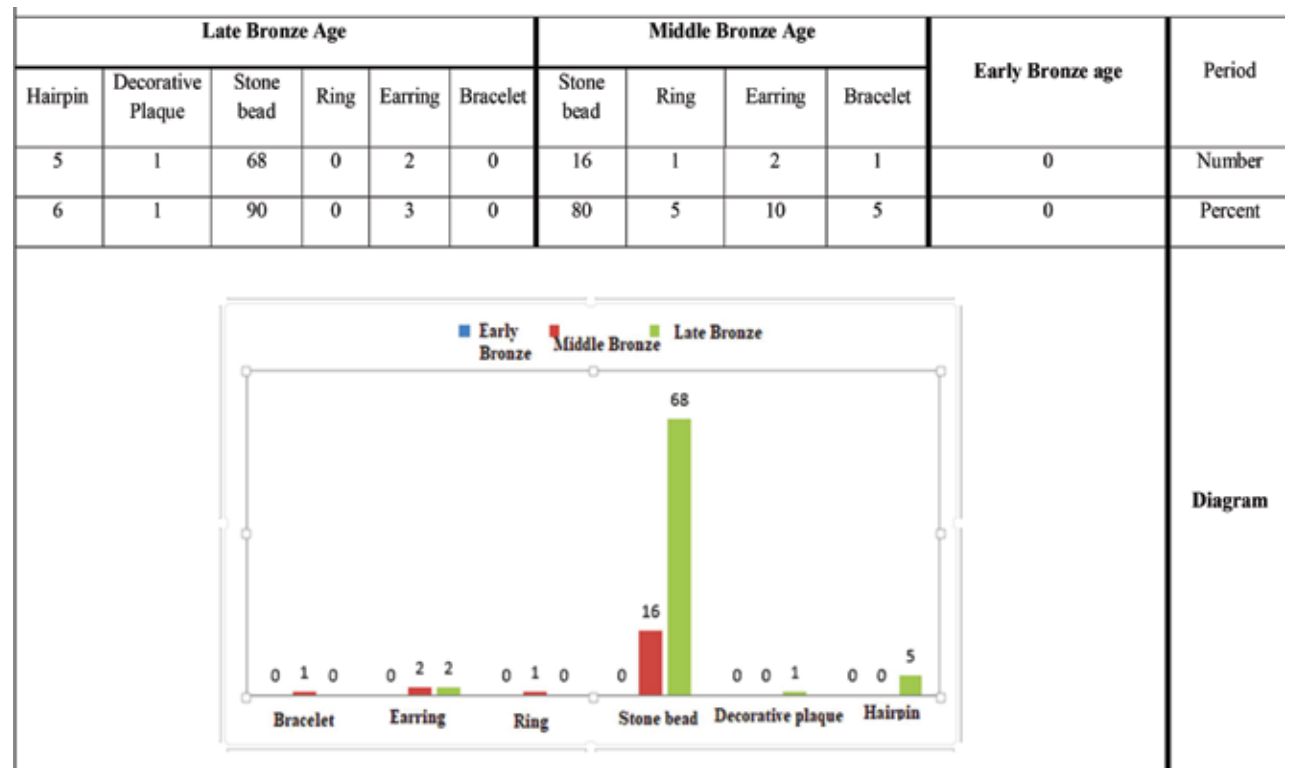




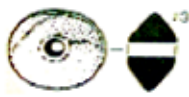





Diagram 4: The ratio of the number of ornaments in the Bronze Age (Early, Middle and Late).

Table 5: Stone objects of tombs (Moradi, 2014: 69).

				
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)		Arne, 1945:Pl: LXXVI, Shah Tepe (Bronze Age)		
				
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)	Arne, 1945:Pl:XXI, Fig: 504	Abbasi, 2011: 99, fig. 105	, Schmidt, 1937: 244, Fig: 188	Masson&Berezkhin, 2005:Pl:98, No: 13
				
Gohar Tepe (Bronze Age)	Abbasi, 2011: 114, fig. 151	, Schmidt, 1931: P:CXLIII, H 22		

Social Classes

The evidence left in connection with the graves of this period (early, middle and late) indicates that there were different social classes in this society and that a social hierarchy was formed. These differences and classes become clear when one compares the graves of each period. It is possible that the objects

found in the graves, including various vessels with ritual functions, belong to a certain social class. Considering the ritual function of these vessels, their use can be seen as a status symbol for people with a higher social position than others in society, which can be seen in the difference between grave goods and especially pottery.

Pottery is used in various cases, and in some cases its use is unrelated to the use of these vessels. According to the external shape of the vessels, we can imagine the use for them (Renfrew, 2002: 1) Like spout vessels, probably suitable for pouring food and liquids and used as serving vessels. All vessels have a special message and refer to people who live in a certain social sphere. The greater the amount of social communication and interaction, the faster these messages are transmitted (Pollock, 1999: 28).

The existence of children's and adult graves in the basement of the residential areas may indicate a ritual function for the members of society. Since all the graves were found in the residential area were found, and there are no differences in the mode of burial, it may perhaps be interpreted that all the members of the society with different classes were buried under the floor of the dwellings and this kind of burial had a ritual function for the members of society.

The abundance of jewelry and other gifts in the Middle Bronze Age may indicate a high-level society or a society that was becoming more complex in this period. If we consider jewelry as part of the dignity and prestige of society, it follows a certain stylistic message. This message may represent the position and social class of the deceased (ibid. 28). Judging by the ornamental offerings preserved from this period, these graves probably belong to the women of the community. This could be a reference to the role and importance of women in the society of that time, both during their lifetime and after their death.

Two new methods used during this period were jar burial and enclosing the deceased in brick. The graves surrounded by bricks have ceramic objects with good firing quality and in new form) and compared to other graves of this period, it is one of the rich graves and shows the special position of the deceased among the other graves. In connection with the children's graves, there are two categories of graves. The first group of graves are Jar burials, all belonging to babies and children, and all but one of the burials had gifts. The second category comprises simple pit graves of two children, one with a necklace plaque and the other with a decanter. The presence of grave goods in all children's graves may indicate the importance of the function of vessels and decorative objects in connection with children's graves. As already mentioned, one of the developments of this period is the appearance of new ceramic forms among the grave goods found in the graves surrounded by bricks. These patterns include incense burners, pouring carafes in new forms seen in this group of graves. The new forms of pottery and the special type of architecture of this group of graves may reflect the special social status of the deceased in this period.

The cultural interaction between the site of Gohar Tepe and neighboring sites is evident from the data obtained from the graves and burial methods of the deceased from this period. The data found in the tombs of Gohar Tepe, especially the Bronze Age pottery, are comparable to Shah Tepe and Turang Tepe, Narges Tepe and the samples found in the cemetery of Parkhai and Altyn Depe in Turkmenistan.

In the Early Bronze Age, burials were made on the ground of residential areas. Burials of this type were found in the neighboring sites of Gohar Tepe, including Narges Tepe IIIc (Early Bronze Age) (Abbasi, 2010: 240) and Shah-Tepe III - IIb (Orsaria, 1995: 487). These burials are also buried in fetal manner.

In the Middle Bronze Age, a simple pit was the most frequently used burial type with 75%. In the neighboring sites of this period (Middle Bronze Age) we also see an abundance of decorative objects

Diagram 6: The position of the body and head of the deceased in the tombs belonging to the southern and south-eastern border sites of the Mazandaran Sea.

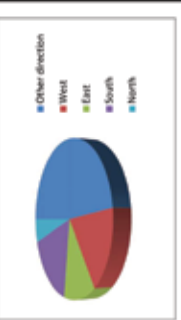
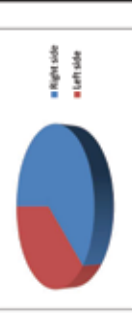
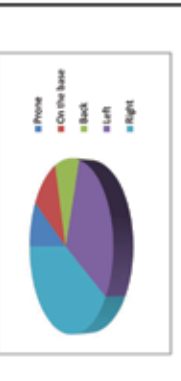

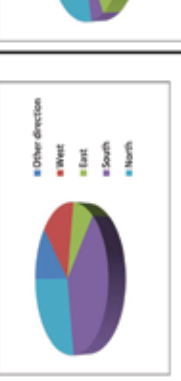
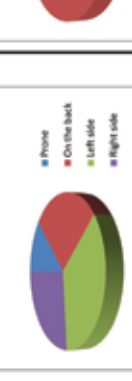
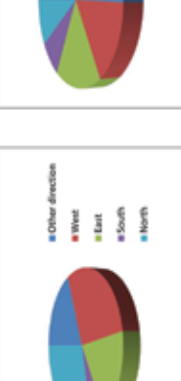

Alayn Depe										Hissar IIIb										Narges Tepe										Shah Tepe					Period																				
Collected on		Head towards					Collected on		Head towards					Collected on		Head towards					Collected on		Head towards					Collected on		Head towards					Type of burial	Direction																			
Right side	Left side	Other direction	West	East	South	North	Prone	On the back	Left side	Right side	Prone	On the base	Back	Left	Right	Prone	On the back	Left side	Right side	Other direction	West	East	South	North	Left side	Right side	Other direction	West	East	South	North	Number	Percent																						
226	146	110	38	29	40	12	4	10	15	22	5	6	5	15	22	25	55	72	55	25	30	17	72	55	17	15	7	11	7	2	11	38	24	59	18	20	9	11																	
60	33	48	17	13	17	5	8	20	28	42	9	11	10	28	42	2	30	39	29	13	15	8	36	28	46	41	18	19	29	5	29	32	21	51	15	17	8	9																	
		The position of the heads of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the bodies of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the heads of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the bodies of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the heads of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the bodies of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the heads of the deceased in the tombs							The position of the bodies of the deceased in the tombs				

Diagram 5: The position of the body and head of the deceased in the tombs belonging to the southern and south-eastern border sites of the Mazandaran Sea

in the graves, examples of which are found in the women's graves at Hissar IIIB and IIIC, Narges Tepe IIb and the elite region of Altyn Depe (2300- 1850) (Seyed Sajjadi, 2007: 481).

In the Early Bronze Age, simple pit graves made up the highest percentage (80%). The appearance of pea, brown and red pottery is one of the other changes and developments in the structure of the graves at the end of this period. For at the end of this period, in addition to the grey pottery of the graves, there is also pottery with red and brown paste. In neighboring sites such as Narges Tepe IIIa (Abbasi, 2011: 132-137) and Hissar IIIC (Roustaei, 2002: 254) as well as TurangTepe, these pottery items are also found in the Late Bronze Age.

Conclusion

From the statistical studies of the burials in the Gohar Tepe site and neighboring areas, it is evident that the deceased in Gohar Tepe were predominantly buried on the left side (65%) and the head of the deceased was facing north. At the site of Narges Tepe, 46% of the deceased were buried on the left side, and the most common direction of the deceased's head was to the north (26%). At the site of Shah Tepe, 32% of the deceased were buried on the left side and 18% of the deceased were buried facing west. At TepeHissar, 72% of the deceased were placed on their left side, and the most common direction of head placement was towards the east. Among the sites in Turkmenistan, 60% of the deceased in the Altyn Depe site were laid on their right sides, and the predominant direction of their heads was south or west. According to the statistical results of the sites in the plains of Gorgan, Mazandaran and Tepe Hissar, there is no significant difference in the position of the bodies of the deceased in the western or eastern direction, but there is a greater difference in the position of their heads in the geographical directions. Another point regarding the unknown burials of these sites is that we do not know anything about their geographical orientation, and the lack of access to information about some sites in Turkmenistan also leads to the incompleteness of these statistical results. Consequently, this hypothesis can be modified as follows: According to the available evidence, the predominant burial type in the southern and south-eastern coastal areas of the Caspian Sea was burial on the left side with the head facing east or west. At the AltynDepe site with 946 graves, the predominant burial type was the burial gathered on the right side with the head facing west or south (Diagram 5).

The second question was asked as follows: Is the Bronze Age society of Gohar Tepe a class society? In answer to this question, the following hypothesis was put forward: The data from the burial at Gohar Tepe and other contemporaneous sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea indicate the existence of a class society and a complex social structure in this area.

The presence of graves with and without funerary objects and the diversity of grave data at the Gohar Tepe site may indicate the existence of a society with different class levels.

The third question was raised in connection with the burial patterns of the sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea. What are the cultural similarities between the burial patterns of the site of Gohar Tepe and the contemporaneous and neighboring sites in the south and southeast of the Caspian Sea and other areas?

The hypothesis put forward in connection with this question was as follows:

The common patterns of burials in the site of Gohar Tepe, the contemporaneous sites south and southeast of the Caspian Sea (Shah Tepe, NargesTepe, Tepe Hissar) and the sites of the neighboring areas indicate the interactions between these areas.

Based on the typological comparison of the objects found in the Gohar Tepe graves with the neighboring sites, cultural similarities can be identified in each of the Bronze Ages (Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages), especially in the pottery.

Depending on their use, the ceramic vessels at these sites convey a common message. The similarity of pottery in graves may also indicate cultural similarities between neighboring regions.

With regard to burial methods, these interpretations can be used to confirm that: The two methods of fetal burial (collected) and supine burial have always been common at sites along the southern and south-eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. The method most commonly used at these sites is the collected (fetal) method.

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