

Analysis of Research on Bronze Age Sites of Turan in Iranian Historiography

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Abstract: This article examines the research conducted by Iranian archaeologists regarding the Bronze Age sites of Turan, elucidating their scholarly approaches and perspectives. Specifically, it highlights the shared and distinct cultural characteristics between the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) and the material culture of Iran and its neighboring regions. The study provides an analytical overview of these findings through a comparative study of the research produced by national, Soviet, and European scholars.

Keywords: Turan, Iran, Mesopotamia, Elam, Sialk, Cheshmeh Ali, Turang Tepe, Tepe Hissar, Shahdad, Shahr-e Sukhteh, Kofir-kala, BMAC, Damghan, Farizi, Chalow, Firuza.

Iranian scholars have interpreted Turan not merely as an extension of Iran, but as an integral component of a vast network of civilizations stretching from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley. They emphasize that the roots of the region's Bronze Age cultures trace back to the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods, highlighting an intrinsic interconnectedness with the Iranian Plateau. Specifically, Sadiq Malik Shahmirzadi asserts that the artifacts of the Anau culture in southern Turkmenistan are fundamentally linked to Bronze Age sites on the Central Iranian Plateau, particularly Sialk and Cheshmeh Ali.

This cultural commonality is most salient in ceramic production. The researcher substantiates this argument by pointing to the emergence of grey ware, which serves as one of the most critical cultural markers in the Bronze Age pottery of both regions.

While analyzing artifacts from the Turang Tepe site in Iran, Shahmirzadi notes that the technology for producing grey ware developed there before proliferating across other areas of the Iranian Plateau. Consequently, this led to the emergence of shared characteristics in ceramic forms and styles across both regions [1].

Similarly, Rajabali Labbaf Khaniki, in his article titled *"Pottery: A Symbol of the Shared Culture of Iran and Central Asia,"* discusses the identification of this ceramic style at the Tepe Hissar (Damghan) site in Iran. He proposes that this factor is an indicator of cultural ties with Turon, suggesting that these populations belonged to a unified cultural entity. This perspective interprets the two regions as a single space, inextricably linked not only through trade but also through ethnic and cultural bonds[2].

These views held by Iranian scholars have also been corroborated in Soviet-era and national research. In particular, the works of V.M. Masson, V. Sarianidi, and A. Askarov contain extensive data regarding the prevalence of this grey ware style in the western foothills of Ashgabat, specifically at the Ak-Tepe and Namazga-Tepe sites [3].

According to Seyid Sajjadi, the cultures in the southwestern part of Turon were directly linked to major centers of civilization in Iran and Mesopotamia. Specifically, the transition from single-chambered kilns to double-chambered kilns enabled the firing of ceramic wares at high temperatures ranging from 1200°C to 1400°C. This technological advancement improved the durability and quality of the vessels. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of the potter's wheel led to the production of high-quality ceramic goods [4].

In the work titled *"Factors in the Formation of Bronze Age (3000–1500 BCE) Architectural Spaces in the Northeastern Regions of the Iranian Plateau,"* Vida Gudarzi notes that certain cultures in northeastern Iran share significant similarities with Turkmenistan. Based on archaeological findings, it can be asserted that cultural ties between these two regions existed from the fourth millennium BCE through historical

periods. Moreover, the cultural affinities and similarities between northeastern Iran and southern Turkmenistan are particularly strong, resulting from the migration of population groups from Turkmenistan to the Iranian Plateau.

Rajabali Labbaf Khaniki posits that by the Bronze Age, northeastern Iran and southern Turkmenistan had evolved into a distinctive, shared cultural center. In particular, sites such as Turang Tepe and Tepe Hissar in the Gorgan Plain, adjacent to Iran, are regarded as the most important centers of this period. These cultures developed in harmony with centers in southern Turkmenistan, such as Namazga [2].

Another archaeologist, Yusif Majidzade, in his research titled "*Methods of Archaeological Excavation*," indicates that ceramic samples found at the Altyndepe settlement in Turon are also widely distributed at the Shahr-e Sukhteh site in Iran's Sistan province, as well as at Kofir-kala near Termez. He suggests this serves as evidence of active mutual socio-economic and trade relations [7].

It is noteworthy that research has also focused specifically on the emergence of early cities in Bronze Age Turon and Iran. In analyzing this process, Iranian scholars advance their own scientific perspectives while drawing upon the views of Soviet and Western schools of archaeology. For instance, Yusif Majidzade synthesizes the views of V. Gordon Childe and Robert Adams to propose his own criteria for the concept of a "city." Among these, particular emphasis is placed on socio-economic factors such as the emergence of surplus product, social stratification, and the division of labor [7]. According to the scholar, urbanization is not merely a result of population growth or the appearance of monumental structures, but rather the outcome of profound socio-economic changes, including the production of surplus beyond the needs of a subsistence society and the emergence of political structures.

In Iranian historiography, two distinct approaches—external influence versus internal development—are reflected in explanations of Bronze Age cultural changes.

For example, Seyid Sajjadi, in his research, characterizes the Turon Bronze culture as an external cultural center that influenced the Iranian Plateau. He explains this view through the results of large-scale studies conducted at sites such as Shahdad, Shahr-e Sukhteh, and Tepe Hissar.

Parviz Varjavand supports this view, noting that the influence of cultures such as Anau III and Namazga IV-V-VI in southern Turkmenistan reached as far as the Dargaz Plain, Shirvan, Gorgan, and Tepe Hissar in Damghan. The author relies on data from the Soviet scholar V. Sarianidi and the French archaeologist P.L. Kohl to reach this conclusion [8].

A similar approach is found in the works of Rajabali Labbaf Khaniki. According to him, the grey ware identified in Iran appeared at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE, and its origins are linked to the Syr Darya and Amu Darya basins. Furthermore, the grey ceramics found at Tepe Hissar are cited as vivid evidence of ancient cultural ties with Turon. Khaniki argues that the Turon ceramic culture influenced not only eastern Iran but also the Central Plateau, eventually leading to the replacement of the Kashan-style pottery at Sialk with the red and grey ceramics characteristic of Turon [2].

However, there are Iranian researchers who disagree with these views. For instance, the perspective of archaeologist Hassan Fazeli Nashli differs significantly. According to the author, in the interactions between Bronze Age communities of Iranian Khorasan and southern Turkmenistan via the Kopet Dag, each region maintained its fundamental indigenous characteristics [10]. This state is evident in the differences between their ceramic wares. Fazeli substantiates his view by noting that polished grey ware is widespread in Khorasan settlements but rare in the Namazga culture of Turkmenistan.

Hamid Tahmasbi, in his article *"The Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) in Northeastern Iran: Indigenous Culture or the Result of External Cultural*

Influence?", emphasizes stratigraphic continuity in determining Iranian cultural primacy. According to him, BMAC sites, particularly Gonur Depe, appeared on vacant land without prior cultural layers. This factor may indicate the migration of a population to Gonur Depe. Conversely, many sites in northeastern Iran, such as Damghan, Farizi, Chalow, and Firuza, contain cultural layers belonging to periods preceding the BMAC [11]. This suggests that the culture did not arrive from the outside but developed on an indigenous foundation.

The same factor can be observed in Soviet-era research. For example, while V.M. Masson views the influence of the Near East and Iran as strong in Turon's Bronze Age culture, V.I. Sarianidi believes that Neolithic and Eneolithic cultures in Turkmenistan formed on an indigenous basis.

In national historiography, scholars such as A. Askarov, Sh. Shaydullaev and A. Shaydullaev address various theories regarding the origin of the BMAC or Oxus Civilization [5]. They do not deny external factors in the development of the Oxus Civilization. Their analysis shows that material culture samples found at Oxus sites indicate trade, economic, and cultural ties with Elam, Mesopotamia, and the Indus Valley. For example, seals and beads characteristic of the Indus Valley and Elamite-style ceramic vessels found at the Buston-6 cemetery provide clear evidence of this. However, these scholars link such similarities to mutual trade and cultural exchange, primarily supporting the second approach – the theory of the primacy of indigenous characteristics.

The aforementioned analyses demonstrate that this controversial issue remains open and necessitates further evidence and in-depth archaeological research.

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