

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND NEAR EAST: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM BÜLÖVKAYA, NAKHCHIVAN, AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

Recent archaeological discoveries at Bülövkaya reveal a complex pattern of local cultural development shaped by long-distance interactions with neighbouring regions. Evidence from the Kültepe I settlement indicates that Halaf-style pottery, originating in northern Mesopotamia, had already reached Nakhchivan by the Neolithic period, suggesting early cultural connections with the broader Near East. These interregional ties persisted into the Chalcolithic period, but the material culture of Nakhchivan also developed distinctive local characteristics. For example, Dalma Tepe-type pottery, originally associated with the Urmia Basin in northwestern Iran, has also been identified at Nakhchivan Tepe. At Bülövkaya, the ceramics assemblage reflects the Ubaid culture, which originated in southern Mesopotamia. The presence of Dalma Tepe-style ceramics in Nakhchivan supports the view that one of the defining features of the Dalma Tepe Culture, typically associated with the Urmia Basin and northern Mesopotamia, is the use of impressed pottery. In contrast, painted wares from the Urmia Basin are classified as Dalma painted ceramics. However, the Dalma tradition itself appears to have been influenced by the Ubaid culture, indicating overlapping cultural spheres. The discovery of Ubaid-style pottery at Bülövkaya confirms the northward diffusion of Ubaid cultural elements into the South Caucasus. At the same time, the absence of Dalma Tepe-style impressed pottery at specific sites in the Urmia Basin and at Bülövkaya suggests the emergence of distinct cultural traditions in these areas, shaped by both local conditions and external influences. The use of obsidian sourced from the South Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia by communities at Bülövkaya highlights the importance of resource zones in facilitating mobility and interregional interaction.

Keywords: *Near East, South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, Dalma Tepe, Ubaid culture*

INTRODUCTION

The ancient relationships between the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, and the Near East have been extensively examined in archaeological scholarship. Beginning in the Soviet period, several researchers argued that Neolithic culture was introduced to the South Caucasus through migration, citing the lack of evidence for a Pre-Pottery Neolithic phase in the region (Merpert, 1978, pp. 18–19; Masson, 1964, p. 407). Isolated examples of Halaf-type ceramics recovered from Neolithic settlements in the South Caucasus suggest a possible Near Eastern origin for the

region's cultural traditions. However, more recent excavations have demonstrated that a distinct local Neolithic culture did, in fact, exist. At the site of Nakhchivan Kültepe, for instance, South Caucasian-style obsidian predominated (Bakhshaliyev et al., 2019, pp. 17–19). Local raw materials were used in metallurgy and metalworking (Bakhshaliyev, 2005, pp. 16–29), and indigenous species of fauna and flora were represented. The architectural forms did not replicate Near Eastern prototypes. Consequently, some researchers now argue that Near Eastern cultural influences reached the South Caucasus

through economic and cultural interaction rather than direct migration (Bakhshaliyev, 2022, p. 149).

However, the limited number of finds has made it difficult to trace these connections. One primary reason was that sites such as Aruchlo, Shomutepe, and Kültepe I were classified as Neolithic in the early twenty-first century, creating an apparent chronological gap between the Late Neolithic and Late Chalcolithic periods. Discoveries made between 2010 and 2017 of Early Chalcolithic sites (Uçan Ağıl, Nakhchivan Tepe, and Bülövkaya) in Nakhchivan helped fill this gap, demonstrating that interactions with the Near East continued during this period (Fig. 1). Researchers have linked these contacts to trade, exchange, the movement of goods, migration, and the diffusion of cultural traits (Tonoike, 2012, pp. 65–80), according to A. Özfirat and K. Marro reported that such interactions were facilitated by colonies established by mobile populations originating in Mesopotamia (Özfirat & Marro, 2007, pp. 1–20). These colonies contributed to the development of trade and to economic and cultural interaction with neighbouring communities. In this context, new finds from the Bülövkaya settlement in Nakhchivan are significant for understanding the region's connections with the Near East.

The Bülövkaya site is located south of Göynük village in the Babek District of Nakhchivan, on the left bank of the Sarısu River, at an elevation of 1,430–1,452 m above sea level. Initial investigations were conducted in 2023 through 2 × 2 m and 2 × 3 m test trenches. In 2024–2025, large-scale excavations were carried out in seven 10 × 10 m areas under the direction of Veli Bakhshaliyev (Fig. 2).

Archaeological research revealed a cultural deposit with two distinct settlement levels differing in soil colour and content. The upper level

(Level I), composed of compact grey soil, contained abundant ceramics, animal bones, obsidian, and other stone tools but lacked evidence of hearths or ash deposits (Fig. 3: 2, 3). The thickness of this layer varied from 0.3 to 0.9 m, depending on the local topography. Excavations exposed rectangular houses and large storage jars (pithoi) buried in the ground. Charcoal samples collected from this level, despite the absence of hearths, yielded radiocarbon dates ranging from 4508 to 4353 cal BC (Table 1).

The lower level (Level II) consisted of light-coloured soil mixed with ash and exhibited better preservation of architectural features. The remains of houses and hearths were clearly identifiable (Fig. 3: 1). Before construction, the area appears to have been levelled; in some cases, the northern sections of houses were cut 10–15 cm into the ground. Posthole patterns indicate the use of wooden pillars in house construction, and their arrangement helped reconstruct the layout of the dwellings (Fig. 4). Evidence suggests that the houses were grouped around open spaces serving as household courtyards. Within these yards, archaeologists uncovered storage pits, hearths, stone tools, ceramics, and the remains of ceramic kilns (Figs. 5–7). Charcoal samples from this level yielded radiocarbon dates of 4953–4723 cal BC and 5007–4782 cal BC (Table 1).

It is noteworthy that the arrangement of houses around household courtyards closely resembles the settlement organisation documented at Ovçular Tepe (Marro, Bakhshaliyev & Ashurov, pp. 53–100, Fig. 8). The influence of the Ubaid culture is particularly evident in the ceramic assemblage.

Bülövkaya Ceramics

The majority of the artefacts recovered from Bülövkaya are ceramic. During the 2024–2025

Table 1. Result Analyses Coal from Early and Middle Chalcolithic Settlement of Nakhchivan

No of Specimen	Lab. Index	Date BP	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ [‰]	Cal BC (95.4%)
Bülövkaya E-5035	LTL33701	5968 ± 45	-14.5 ± 0.1	4953-4723BC
Bülövkaya E-4015	LTL33702	6001 ± 45	-15.8 ± 0.5	5007-4782BC
Bülövkaya 2021	LTL21697	5611 ± 45	-24.5 ± 0.5	4508-4353 BC
Naxçıvan Tepe-1165	LTL18624A	5724 ± 45	-20.3 ± 0.1	4686-4464 BC
Naxçıvan Tepe-2095	LTL17636A	5956 ± 45	-25.9 ± 0.5	4945-4722 BC
Uchan Ağıl 15-2019	LTL16009A	5713 ± 45	-23.4 ± 0.4	4690-4450 BC
Uzunoba 15- 010	LTL16019A	5674 ± 45	-20.3 ± 0.5	4620-4370 BC



Fig.1. Map of the region and Chalcolithic settlements of Nakhchivan

excavation seasons, a total of 10,507 ceramic sherds were recovered, of which 1,939 represent reconstructable vessel forms. The ceramic assemblage can be categorised into four principal groups: 69.6% plain pink wares, 27.4% painted wares, 2% brown wares, and 1% black or grey wares.

Plain Ceramics

The majority of the plain pink vessels are unpainted — their colours range from yellowish to reddish and orange. The firing quality is generally high; however, several examples exhibit a grey or black core, suggesting incomplete oxidation during firing. Some vessels were carefully burnished and coated with a red slip on the interior, whereas others display comb-like tool impressions on the exterior. Among the plainwares, bowl-shaped vessels predominate, whereas pot forms are rare. Pot types are generally characterised by short, outward-bent rims and convex bodies (Fig. 8: 1–2). Six distinct bowl types have been identified within the assemblage.

Plain Bowl Type 1 is the most frequent variety, characterised by a convex body and an inward-bent rim (Fig. 8: 4–5). Several examples exhibit a cylindrical-convex profile (Fig. 8: 3), comparable to vessels from the Ubaid 3 phase at

Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 218: 2–5) and the Ubaid horizon at Tell Arpachiyah (Mallowan & Cruikshank, 1933, Fig. 16: 1–4). Analogous forms are also known from the Urmia Basin sites of Seh Gabi (Henrickson, 1983, Figs. 42:6; 70:55.1) and Choga Maran (Henrickson, 1983, Fig. 108:1–4), although the Bülövkaya specimens differ slightly in morphology.

Plain Bowl Type 2 possesses a convex body with outward-bent rims (Fig. 8: 6–7). Painted analogues of this form are well represented in Ubaid 3 contexts at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 281:6, 8) and within the Ubaid horizon at Tell Arpachiyah (Mallowan & Cruikshank, 1933, Fig. 33).

Plain Bowl Type 3 is defined by a convex body and a thickened outward-projecting rim (Fig. 8: 12). Comparable examples are documented at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 272), although the Bülövkaya specimens differ slightly and may reflect local adaptations or imitations of Ubaid prototypes.

Plain Bowl Type 4 comprises convex-bodied bowls fitted with cylindrical spouts positioned just below the rim (Fig. 8(10)). This vessel form is attested at the Kültepe I settlement (Bakhshaliyev, 2021, p. 57, fig. 46) and in Ubaid 3 contexts at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, p. 407, Fig. 334).



Fig.2. Excavation sites in Bülövkaya settlement

Plain Bowl Type 5 possesses a conical body represented by several morphological variants (Fig. 8: 8). In some specimens, the rim is thickened and projects slightly outward (Fig. 8: 9). This vessel form is widely attested at sites such as Seh Gabi and Choga Maran in the Urmia Basin (Henrickson,

1983, Fig. 107:6–9), as well as at several other sites associated with the Ubaid cultural tradition.

A conical body likewise characterises Plain Bowl Type 6. Its central section, however, protrudes slightly outward (Fig. 8: 9). These vessels, commonly referred to as “cream bowls” in the archaeological literature, find their earliest parallels in the Halaf levels at Sabi Abyad (Akkermans, 1987, Fig. 4:10; Akkermans, 1989, Fig. IV:28, 204) and at Tell Arpachiyah (Mallowan & Cruikshank, 1933, Fig. 54:4). They are further attested at Yarim Tepe II (Amirov, 2018, Fig. 7:1, 3; Merpert & Munchaev, 1987, fig. 19:3–4), Tell Agab (Davidson & Watkins, 1981, Fig. 2:4), and within the Ubaid level at Tülintepe (Esin & Arsebük, 1974, p.121; Esin & Arsebük, 1982, p.91). Notably, this vessel type is absent from sites associated with the Dalma Tepe cultural horizon.

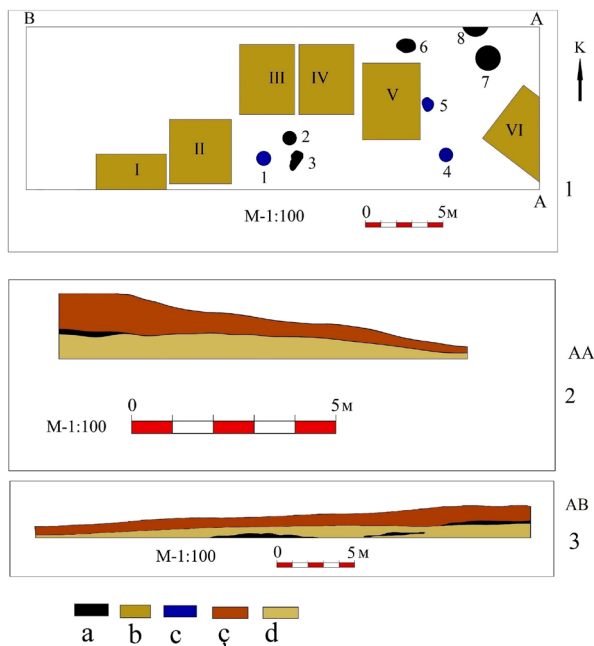


Fig.3. Plans of houses of the lower (second) level and sections of excavations at the Bülövkaya settlement. 1-plans of houses of the second level (I-VI); 2-3-cuts; a -remains of hearths (2, 3, 6-8) and ash; b-houses; c -pits (1, 4-5); ç -first level; d- second level.

Painted Ceramics

The second principal ceramic group identified at Bülövkaya consists of painted vessels (Fig. 10). The most frequent decorative motif consists of a series of superimposed triangles. However, straight lines, zigzag patterns, spike-shaped designs, and circular motifs are also represented. Pot forms are rare and are represented solely by rim fragments. As with the plain ceramics, the most prevalent painted forms are bowls. Five distinct bowl types have been identified.



Fig.4. Posthole patterns and traces of houses on the lower (second) level

Painted Bowl Type 1 is characterised by a convex body and a slightly inward-bent rim (Fig. 11:1, 2, 4).

Painted Bowl Type 2 is a cylindrical-convex bowl (Fig. 11:3, 5–7). Comparable painted examples are attested at Ubaid culture sites, including the Ubaid 3 phase at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 218:2–5) and the Ubaid horizon at Tell Arpachiyah (Mallowan & Cruikshank, 1933, Fig. 16:1–4). Examples from Urmia Basin sites, such as Choga Maran (Henrickson, 1983, Fig. 107:14–19) and Seh Gabi B (Henrickson, 1983, Fig. 61:53.1, 53.2), exhibit minor morphological variations.

Painted Bowl Type 3 is defined by a convex body and an outward-bent rim (Fig. 11:8). Plain examples are common at sites in the Urmia Basin, whereas painted examples are rare and have been recorded only at Seh Gabi B (Henrickson, 1983, Fig. 73:13). This form closely parallels Ubaid 3 bowls from Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 281:6, 8).

Painted Bowl Type 4 comprises conical-bodied bowls that exhibit considerable morphological variation at Bülövkaya (Fig. 11:9). Comparable forms are documented at Seh Gabi B, Choga Maran, and Tepe Siahbid (Henrickson, 1983, pp. 223–430), as well as within the Ubaid 3 phase at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, fig. 194:1–9) and the Ubaid horizon at Tell Arpachiyah (Mallowan & Cruikshank, 1933, Fig. 32). A subset of these conical bowls possesses

rims thickened outward—a feature not attested at Urmia Basin sites, including those associated with the Dalma Tepe cultural horizon.

Painted Bowl Type 5 consists of cream-coloured bowls with conical bodies (Fig. 11:10–11). The interiors are decorated with geometric motifs rendered in paint. Parallels for this vessel form in the Near East have been discussed above.

Brown Ceramics

A brown firing colour characterises this group of ceramics. Most vessels were tempered with coarse sand, although examples containing chaff temper are also present. Some sherds contain inclusions of white lime and mica. Many samples exhibit a poorly fired, grey or black core layer, indicating uneven oxidation during firing. On some vessels, traces of a comb-like tool are visible on the exterior surface. The majority of the brown ceramics are bowl-type vessels, typically featuring convex or biconical bodies (Fig. 12:1–8, 10). One bowl-type vessel bears a vertically oriented, ear-shaped handle attached to the rim (Fig. 12:13). Such handles are rare in Neolithic and Chalcolithic contexts and are usually represented by isolated finds. In the Neolithic of Azerbaijan, this handle type is known only from the İlanlı Tepe settlement (Narimanov, 1987, p.238, Fig. 42). Handles recovered from the Early Chalcolithic levels at Mentesh Tepe (Lyonnet

et al., 2012, pp. 97–98, Fig. 142) differ from both the Bülövkaya and İlanlı Tepe examples.

Pot-type bowls in this group possess convex bodies, and some exhibit protruding convex bases (Fig. 12:9). A few vessels are fitted with horn-shaped handles positioned along the mid-body. Many examples bear traces of soot and surface abrasion. Their recovery from within and around hearths suggests they were used for cooking or domestic purposes. Notably, this vessel type is found at both architectural levels of the Bülövkaya settlement. The presence of such ceramics in Early Chalcolithic contexts is significant for tracing the origins of comb-patterned and mica-tempered wares, which become more widespread during the Late Chalcolithic period. Based on the Bülövkaya evidence, this ceramic tradition appears to have originated during the Early Chalcolithic period. Ceramic sherds bearing comb-tool impressions on their exterior surfaces are known in small quantities from Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic sites across the South Caucasus. Examples have been recorded at Jut Tepe (Akhundov, 2017, p.45, Table 13:2), Mentesh Tepe (Lyonnet et al., 2012, pp. 86–87), and Nakhchivan Tepe (Bakhshaliyev,

2019, vol. 101, Fig. 4:3). A similar surface treatment is documented at Tepe Gheshlagh in the Urmia Basin (Sharifi & Motarjem, 2018, p.91, Fig. 9) and on ceramics from the Ubaid 3 phase at Tell Abada (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 384), with some examples almost identical to those from Bülövkaya (Jassim, 2021, Fig. 384:4, 7, 10, 11). This ceramic type is also well represented in Late Chalcolithic assemblages. Brown-coloured ceramics from sites in Nakhchivan (Seyidov, Bakhshaliyev, & Mahmudova, 2010, pp. 63–78) and Mill Step (Narimanov, 1987, p. 125) constitute a small proportion of the Late Chalcolithic ceramic assemblages (Bakhshaliyev, 2023, pp. 110–112).

Black or grey ceramics

Black and grey ceramics were recovered in small quantities from the Bülövkaya settlement (Fig. 12:11–12). The vessels in this group were produced from clay tempered with chaff and sand, and occasionally from untempered clay. Most examples are well-fired. Some pieces were lightly burnished on both surfaces, whereas others were polished only on the exterior. A few vessels retain traces of black pigment on their interior surfaces. The exterior surfaces of several specimens also bear comb-tool impressions.

Among the bowl-type vessels, some are decorated with applied knob ornaments, whereas others display horn-shaped handles. In terms of form and manufacturing technique, these ceramics closely correspond to specific pink-coloured wares recovered from the site. Black ceramics are extremely rare in Neolithic and Chalcolithic assemblages from the Nakhchivan region.

Relationships with Mesopotamia and the Urmia Basin

The ceramic assemblage from Bülövkaya reflects a synthesis of local traditions and broader Near Eastern influences, particularly those from Mesopotamia and the Urmia Basin. Both plain and painted wares from the site share close affinities with Ubaid-type ceramics recovered from Tell Abada, Yarim Tepe II, Tülin-tepe, Değirmentepe, and other sites. Of particular significance are the cream bowls from Bülövkaya, which closely parallel examples from the Near East. Notably, such vessels have not yet been documented in either the Urmia Basin or within the Dalma Tepe cultural horizon.

Although a range of decorative motifs occurs in



Fig. 5. Stone tools



Fig. 6. Obsidian and flint tools

the Bülövkaya ceramics, stacked triangles are the most common. Vessel forms and decorative styles strongly indicate the influence of Mesopotamian ceramic traditions. Painted ceramics from the site are characterised by black-on-buff and black-on-red designs, with the black-on-buff pattern predominating. Red-slipped and black-on-red painted wares were widespread in the Urmia Basin throughout the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (Abedi, Omrani & Karimifar, 2015, pp. 23–40). The occurrence of horn-shaped handles at Bülövkaya also parallels examples from the Urmia Basin, further attesting to interregional cultural contact.

Most painted ceramics from the Urmia Basin are classified as Dalma Painted Ware. This pottery, found in Late Chalcolithic contexts dating to the second half of the fifth millennium BC at sites such as Julfa Kültepe (Abedi et al., 2014a, pp. 33–167) and Tepe Sarsakti (Abedi et al., 2014b, pp. 101–114), is associated with the Dalma Tepe cultural tradition. It is noteworthy that Bülövkaya lacks impressed wares, which are common in the Urmia Basin (Henrickson, 1983, p.203) and at Dalma Tepe (Hamlin, 1975, pp. 111–127). For this reason, the Bülövkaya assemblage cannot be attributed to the Dalma Tepe cultural horizon. Instead, the available

evidence suggests that the site represents a distinct artistic tradition that developed under the influence of the Ubaid cultural complex.

Ceramics with knob, fingerprints, and incised ornaments

A group of ceramic vessels from Bülövkaya is decorated with knobs, finger impressions, and incised motifs. These decorative elements primarily consist of finger impressions and grooves applied onto a relief belt that encircles the vessel body (Fig. 9:1–4). Ceramics exhibiting this decorative style are absent at Early Chalcolithic sites in the Urmia Basin and within the Dalma Tepe cultural horizon of northwest Iran. However, this decorative tradition is widespread at Early Chalcolithic sites in Eastern Anatolia, with notable examples from Tülintepe (Esin, 1993, Fig. 3:19) and Değirmentepe (Esin, 1983, Fig. 6:10–16). The finger-impressed relief-belt pattern first emerged in the Urmia Basin during the Late Chalcolithic period.

Additional decorative elements include applied knobs (Fig. 9:8–9) and crescent-shaped reliefs (Fig. 9:10–11). Such knob and crescent-shaped decorations are attested in the Halaf culture,



Fig. 7. Bone tools

notably at Umm Dabagiyah (Kirkbride, 1972, pl. XI:5, 8, 12), Tell Boueid (Nieuwenhuys, 2004, Fig. 9:5–6), Kültepe I (Abibullayev, 1982, Fig. X:13), and several other sites. Some vessels are decorated with incised designs executed on the relief belt (Fig. 9:6–7). Both knob and incised relief-belt ornaments are also characteristic of Eastern Anatolian sites (Esin, 1993, Figs. 1, 3, 6).

Rim and Base Decorations of Pottery

The rims of certain vessels bear incised decorative patterns (Fig. 9:6–7). The vessel bases are either flat or slightly projecting and may be disc-shaped or rounded (Fig. 9:12, 14, 15). Handles are typically loop-shaped and attached high on the vessel body beneath the rim (Fig. 9:13), although some specimens display horn-shaped handles (Fig. 9:5). These horn-shaped handles are common in the Urmia Basin, particularly within the Dalma Tepe cultural tradition, yet they are rare in the Ubaid culture. Comparable handles are documented from the Halaf levels at Sabi Abyad (Akkermans, 1989, Fig. IV:17), Tell Damishiliyya (Akkermans, 1988, Fig. 16:120), Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements in the South Caucasus (Bakhshaliyev et al., 2017, Figs. 110–112), and various sites in the Urmia Basin (Henrickson, 1983, Fig. 85:8). Such handles occur only infrequently during the Late Chalcolithic period.

Relationships with Eastern Anatolia

Some ceramics from Bülövkaya are decorated

with applied knobs, impressed motifs, and incised designs. As noted above, knob-shaped relief ornaments have been employed in ceramic decoration across the South Caucasus since the Neolithic period. Such ornaments are well documented at Aruchlo (Lyonnet et al., 2012, p.79, Fig. 112), Khramis Didi Gora (Kiguradze, 1986, Fig. 70), and Kültepe I (Bakhshaliyev, 2022, p.146, Fig. 7:1). Vessels with bodies encircled by a relief belt are likewise attested at Kültepe I (Bakhshaliyev, 2022, p.146, Fig. 7:8–9).

Crescent-shaped decorative patterns are attested at both Halaf sites and Neolithic monuments in the South Caucasus. Ceramics decorated with fingerprint impressions and incised designs applied over a relief belt are absent from settlements in the South Caucasus and the Urmia Basin, but occur at Chalcolithic sites in Eastern Anatolia. By contrast, Eastern Anatolia has yielded distinctive examples of ceramics decorated with fingerprint impressions and incised motifs executed on relief belts (Esin, 1993, pp. 105–119). It is therefore plausible that these decorative traditions spread into the South Caucasus through cultural interactions with Eastern Anatolia.

Sources of Raw Materials

A complementary line of evidence for regional interactions during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods derives from the procurement and circulation of raw materials. The South Caucasus is rich in natural resources, including abundant

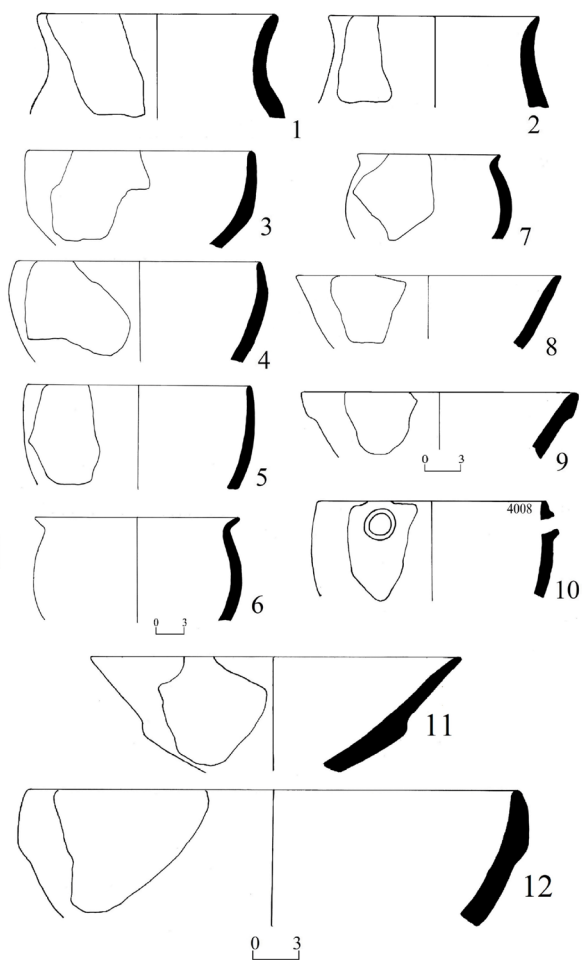


Fig. 8. Red plain ceramics

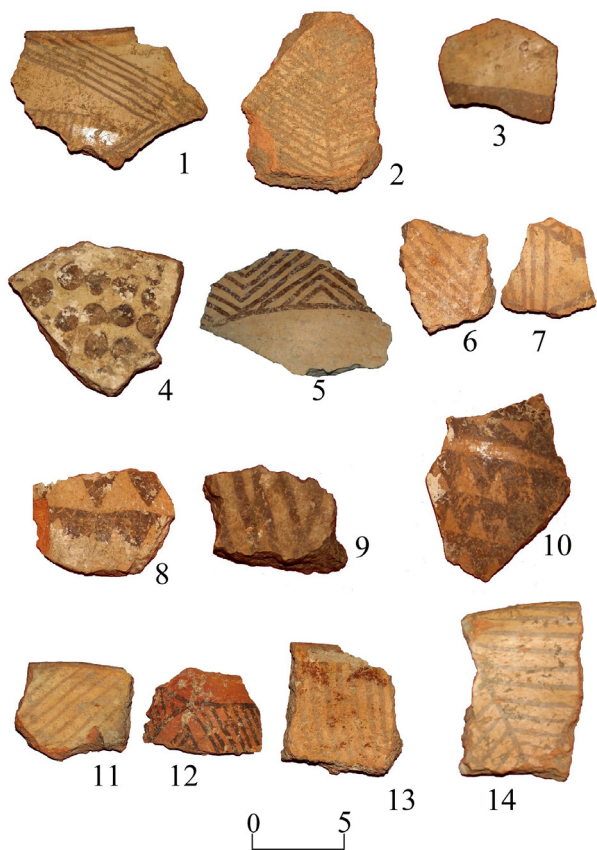


Fig. 10. Painted ceramics

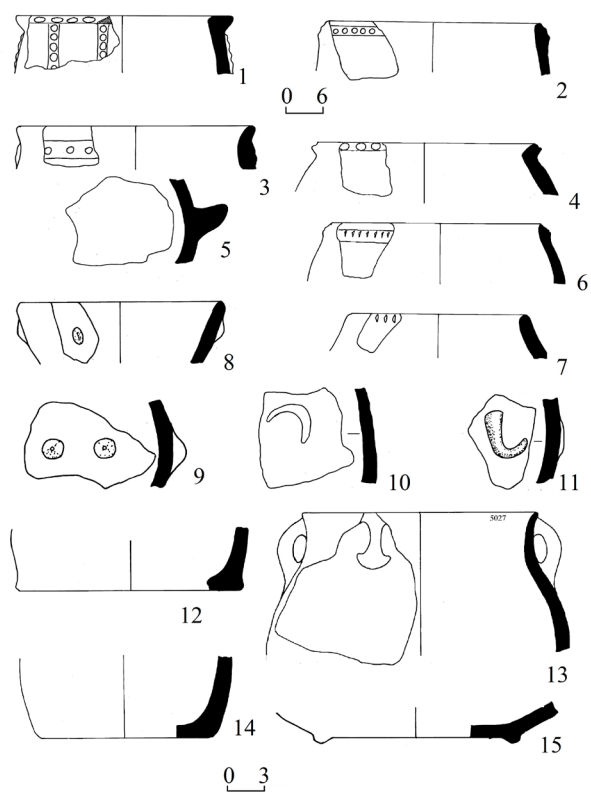


Fig. 9. Red ceramics with knob, fingerprint and incised ornaments

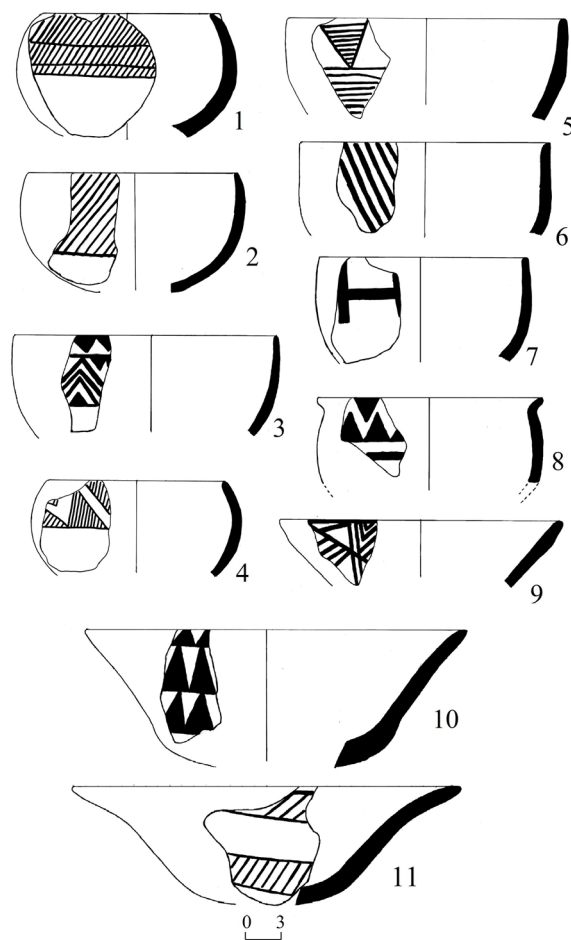


Fig. 11. Types of painted ceramics

copper and obsidian deposits. Nakhchivan, in particular, possesses significant copper reserves (Bakhshaliyev, 2005, pp. 16–28), as do the Zangezur Mountains along its southern border (Yessen, 1935, pp. 7–216). Although copper artefacts have not been recovered from Early Chalcolithic sites in Nakhchivan, mining tools from Nakhchivan Tepe, Uçan Ağıl, and Bülövkaya (including one specimen from Nakhchivan Tepe bearing traces of copper oxide) indicate that copper extraction and processing were already underway during this period (Bakhshaliyev, 2021, p. 384, Fig. 10).

Studies indicate that while Eastern Anatolian obsidian was the predominant material used in the Near East during the Neolithic period, obsidian from the South Caucasus began to circulate from the late sixth millennium BC onward (Barge et al., 2018, pp. 310–311). By the Dalma Tepe period, obsidian from the Zangezur and Göyhasar sources dominated assemblages in the Urmia Basin (Abedi et al., 2018, p. 763). During the Early Chalcolithic period, Eastern Anatolian obsidian was utilised by the inhabitants of Nakhchivan in notably greater proportions than in earlier phases. The obsidian has been traced to sources in Zangezur, Göyche (Lake Sevan), and Eastern Anatolia (Bakhshaliyev

& Bakhshaliyev, 2021, pp. 189–191).

Assemblages from this period exhibit considerable variation from site to site. At Nakhchivan Tepe, for example, Zangezur obsidian accounts for 42%, Göyhasar for 37%, and Meydandagh for 19% (Orange et al., 2021, p. 129). At Uçan Ağıl, Zangezur obsidian dominates at 86%, with limited representation of Göyhasar material. At Bülövkaya, Zangezur likewise served as the primary source, supplemented by minor quantities derived from Meydandagh.

DISCUSSION

Finds from the Bülövkaya settlement indicate that contacts with the Near East, initiated in the seventh to sixth millennia BC, intensified during the fifth millennium BC (Bakhshaliyev et al., 2024, p. 17). The distribution of materials at Early Chalcolithic sites in Nakhchivan suggests that this intensification was closely linked to the South Caucasus's rich natural resources — abundant pastures, substantial copper reserves, and extensive obsidian deposits. The new evidence from Bülövkaya presented here further supports the interpretation that these connections were maintained and even strengthened between the early and mid-fifth millennium BC.

The pronounced influence of the Ubaid culture is evident in both the plain and painted ceramic assemblages from Bülövkaya. However, these ceramics do not precisely replicate Ubaid forms or fabric types. Alongside Ubaid traits, the Bülövkaya ceramics also preserve elements of local Neolithic traditions and influences from Eastern Anatolian cultural groups. While the impact of the Ubaid culture is evident in the painted ceramics, connections with Eastern Anatolia are particularly apparent in vessels decorated with fingerprint impressions and incised motifs applied on relief belts. Notably, the ceramics from Bülövkaya differ from those of the nearby Urmia Basin, suggesting regional variability in interaction patterns. The Bülövkaya ceramic tradition, while drawing on elements from both the Ubaid and Eastern Anatolian cultures, can be understood as having developed its own distinctive decorative style.

A comparative analysis of Early Chalcolithic sites in the Urmia Basin and Nakhchivan suggests the emergence of a new cultural tradition in Nakhchivan during this period—one distinct from those of Mesopotamia, northwestern Iran, and other South Caucasian regions. This tradition differs

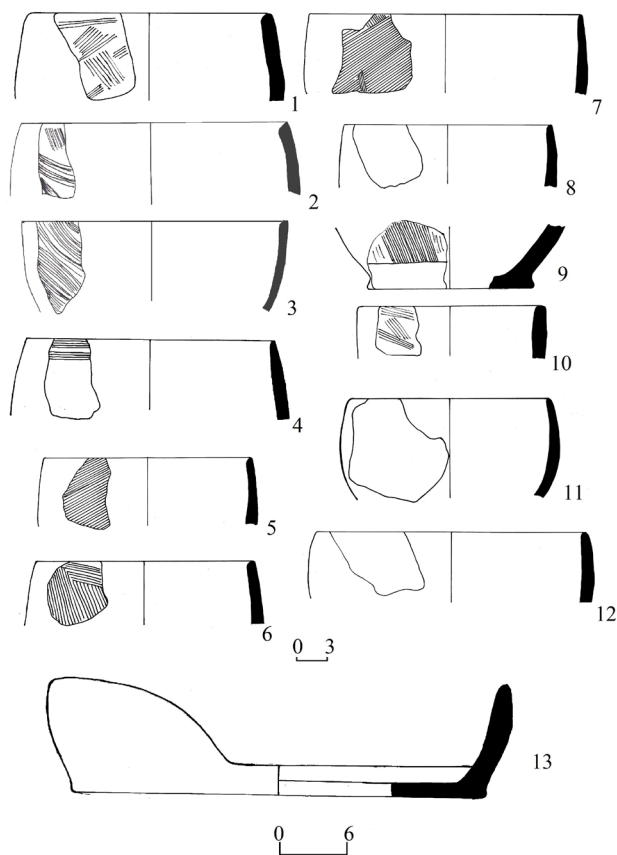


Fig. 12. Brown and black (11-12) ceramics

from the Dalma Tepe culture, which spread across Mesopotamia, the Urmia Basin, and Nakhchivan during the fifth millennium BC, in the absence of impressed and red-slipped wares. The formation of this new cultural entity was undoubtedly influenced by the Ubaid tradition, likely due to the gradual northward movement of communities originating in northern Mesopotamia (Stein, 2012, pp. 23–44). Through such movements and interactions, these cultural traditions converged and merged, ultimately giving rise to a new hybrid cultural tradition.

CONCLUSION

Recent research at Bülövkaya demonstrates that, by the late sixth and early fifth millennia BC, economic and cultural connections between the South Caucasus and the Near East had intensified, and that Near Eastern civilisations exerted a strong influence on the Chalcolithic culture of Nakhchivan. The presence of Ubaid traits in the ceramics reflects this process directly. Archaeological evidence suggests that these influences were associated with the northward diffusion of the Ubaid culture, as indicated by the large number of Ubaid-type painted vessels recovered from the site.

We propose that this northward cultural influence contributed to the formation of a distinct cultural horizon that emerged at the interface between

the Urmia Basin and Eastern Anatolia, extending into Nakhchivan. The Bülövkaya community appears to have practised both mobile pastoralism and small-scale mining. Bülövkaya's plain and painted ceramics, distinguished by their forms and decorative schemes, exhibit Ubaid influence yet lack the impressed and red-slipped ceramics characteristic of Dalma Tepe sites. This absence further reinforces the conclusion that Bülövkaya represents an independent cultural tradition—one shaped, but not subsumed, by Ubaid influence.

Finally, the archaeological record indicates that the use of South Caucasian obsidian increased in settlements across Mesopotamia and the Urmia Basin during the sixth–fifth millennia BC. In this context, the movement of groups into Nakhchivan may have been motivated by its rich natural resources—particularly obsidian—and its extensive pastures, which together rendered the region a strategic and economically valuable zone within broader interregional exchange networks.

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