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COMMENT ON “METAL QUIVERS FROM HASANLU” BY CIFARELLI M.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to clarify several contradictory ideas found in the paper *Metal Quivers from Hasanlu* (Cifarelli & Castelluccia, 2023). It should also be noted that the absence of references to ancient written sources and archaeological findings from neighboring regions significantly reduces the scientific value of that work. In this comment, Hasanlu findings are compared with material culture samples from a wide geographical area extending from Central Asia to Nakhchivan. As a result, new directions for future research are identified that may help eliminate a one-sided interpretative approach.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Hasanlu, Central Asia, Manna, Nakhchivan

The ancient city of Hasanlu was founded by local Turkic tribes inhabiting the wider region of Azerbaijan. Archaeological excavations conducted across the settlement areas of these tribes — including Western Azerbaijan (present-day Armenia), Nakhchivan, Karabakh, and South Azerbaijan — indicate cultural continuity and shared material traditions among the local populations. In addition to material culture revealed through excavations, paleoanthropological evidence suggests that populations living across a broad geographical zone extending from Eastern Anatolia to Central Asia shared common cultural and anthropological features associated with early Turkic groups.

Human burials discovered in the Eneolithic layer at Hasanlu display similarities to the burial practices documented at Kultepe I in Nakhchivan as well as at Central Asian cultural sites such as Jeytun, Anau, and Namazgan. One notable feature is the orientation of the deceased toward the rising sun, a burial custom that appears widely distributed in Eneolithic contexts and later preserved in traditional belief systems.

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Furthermore, archaeological discoveries at Hasanlu, together with materials from the Haji Firuz and Dalmatepe settlements in South Azerbaijan, provide important grave monuments that contribute to the study of Eneolithic cultural development and regional interactions involving the ancestors of the Azerbaijani Turkic population (i.e. the prototurkic tribes) (Bakhshaliyev & Bakhshaliyev, 2023, p. 29).

The ancient city of Hasanlu is situated on a high mound in the Ushnu–Sulduz valley, southwest of Lake Urmia in South Azerbaijan. Archaeological evidence indicates that this settlement was continuously inhabited over a long chronological span, from the Neolithic period through the Middle Ages. Among the Iron Age settlements of South Azerbaijan, Hasanlu demonstrates some of the most developed cultural and civilizational features. The archaeological materials recovered from Hasanlu make it possible to trace both the advanced local cultural traditions of this ancient center and its interactions with neighboring regions. In particular, ceramic vessels discovered in Iron Age burial contexts at Hasanlu show close similarities to ceramic assemblages from the Nakhchivan and Karabakh regions of Azerbaijan, as well as to comparable materials from Central Asia.

Ceramic vessels with bird-beak-shaped spouts were discovered at the Middle Bronze Age settlement of Jarkutan in the Surkhan-Darya Province of southern Uzbekistan (see *The Cultural Legacy of Uzbekistan*, pp. 31–32; see also Figure 1). Similar ceramic forms, associated with pastoral communities practicing seasonal transhumant livestock husbandry, have been identified in settlements and burial contexts of the same period in Nakhchivan, Karabakh, and South Azerbaijan. The presence of such clay vessels at Hasanlu indicates that this historical center participated in a broader cultural sphere extending across the wider Turkic world (see Figure 2).

Early parallels for Hasanlu ceramics have been identified primarily within the territory of Azerbaijan. Earlier examples of bowls with bird-beak-shaped spouts comparable to those found in Hasanlu IV occur within the painted pottery culture of Nakhchivan (see Figures 2 and 3). Comparable ceramic forms have been documented at Kultepe I, Gizilveng, Shahtakhti, Qivrag, and Julfa in Nakhchivan (Aliyev, 1991, p. 241, fig. 30; Bakhshaliyev, 2002, p. 85).

In the territory of Azerbaijan, the cultural traditions established by local populations within the geographical zone of the Kura–Araz culture, which formed in the second half of the 4th millennium BC, continued to develop in subsequent periods. During the time of the expansion of the Kura–Araz cultural horizon, the Lullubi, Kutu, and Turukki tribes inhabited the basin of Lake Urmia. In later periods, movements of Hurrian groups are documented across regions extending from Eastern Anatolia to Northern Syria, where they settled primarily in mountainous areas. I. M. Dyakonov emphasizes that South Azerbaijan represented a geographical zone in which the Kutu, Lullubi, and Kashshu populations were distributed, rather than the Hurrians (Dyakonov, 1956, pp. 101–119; Dyakonov, 1966, pp. 5–8).

During the Middle Bronze Age in the South Caucasus, particularly in the regions of Karabakh and Nakhchivan, the painted pottery culture developed precisely by local tribes. At the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, this cultural tradition—shaped by external cultural influences and expanding trade relations—marked a new stage in the emergence of early urban settlements across the South Caucasus and the wider territory of Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and the Urmia basin (Bakhshaliyev, 2002, pp. 56–60).

The archaeological materials from Hasanlu IV, which correspond chronologically to the period of the Khojaly–Gadabay cultural complex distributed across Western Azerbaijan (present-day Armenia), Karabakh, and Nakhchivan, reflect the standard of living of the local population, their economic interactions with neighboring regions, and the inheritance of technological traditions during the Iron Age.

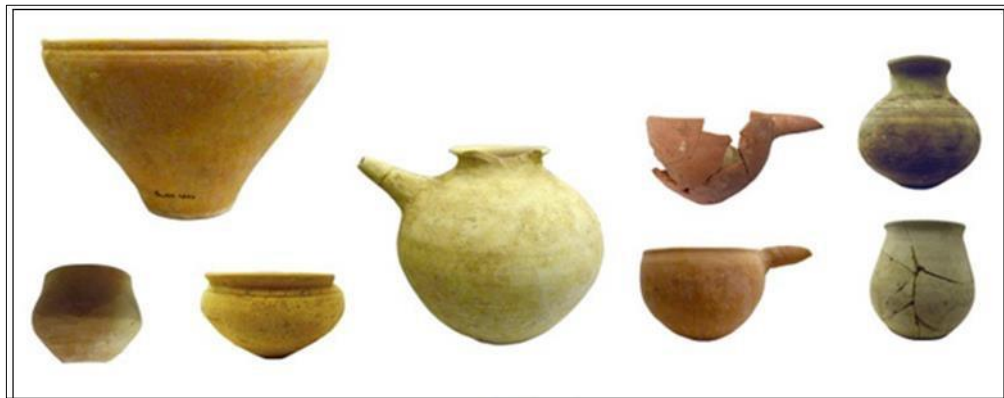


Figure 1. *Middle Bronze Age Ceramic Vessels From the Jarkutan Site (Surkhan-Darya Province, Uzbekistan)*



Figure 2. *Gray Ceramic Vessels from the Hasanlu IV Level (Iron Age II, 1050–800 BC)*



Figure 3. *Painted Pottery of the Nakhchivan Culture (2nd Millennium – Early 1st Millennium BC)*

The final phase of the ancient city of Hasanlu coincides with the period during which Scythian Turkic tribes protected the territory of South Azerbaijan from external incursions. The Scythian groups, who played an important role in the military and political history of the Middle East at the beginning of the first millennium BC, were primarily distributed across Central Asia and the Caucasus.

By the beginning of the 7th century BC, the basin of Lake Urmia had become a region with a significant presence of Scythian Turkic tribes. Among the lines of evidence suggesting that Hasanlu functioned as a settlement associated with ancient Turkic groups of Azerbaijan, the following points may be noted:

1. The material culture recovered from Hasanlu may be interpreted as belonging to a broader proto-Turkic cultural sphere extending from the Caucasus to Central Asia. Archaeological evidence concerning subsistence practices and excavated material remains indicates a population engaged in seasonal pastoral cattle breeding. Horse keeping constituted an important component of the economic and social life of these Turkic communities. Evidence for the development of horse breeding at Hasanlu includes a carved tree relief depicting a horse and rider, as well as vessels shaped as the heads of a horse, ram, and bull, together with a horse burial dated to the 9th century BC (Crawford, 1961, pp. 92–93). A comparable horse burial has also been recorded at Shahtakhti in Nakhchivan (Qashqai, 1993, p. 84).
2. The gold bowl discovered at Hasanlu depicts the Sun, Moon, and Storm deities represented on a war chariot, imagery that is interpreted as reflecting important elements of the ancient religious beliefs associated with local Turkic groups of Azerbaijan. The chariot-riding Storm deity is understood as a war god whose symbolic animal is the bull (Qashqai, 1993, p. 103). In traditional belief systems attributed to early Turkic communities, the bull is widely regarded as a symbol of strength and power.
3. The closest parallels for the weapons recovered from Hasanlu III may be observed among the armaments associated with Scythian and Cimmerian Turkic tribes. Some researchers note that the two- and three-bladed arrowheads discovered in Hasanlu III represent a development of the forms

documented in Hasanlu IV, or possibly derive from even earlier local weapon traditions (Thornton & Pigott, 2011, pp. 168–169, fig. 6.31). This evidence supports the interpretation that the foundations of the city of Hasanlu were established by local populations of Turkic origin and reflects the continuity of indigenous technological traditions.

4. Although paleogenetic research remains limited, recent analyses of Hasanlu IVB conducted within the framework of the *Ancient DNA Pilot Project* indicate that the population inhabiting this site belonged to local groups of South Azerbaijan (Dulik, Lorenz, & Schurr, 2011, pp. 197–199).
5. The samples of 263 human remains (212 from Hasanlu and 51 from the nearby site of Dinka Tepe) are considered among the most important paleoanthropological finds in the Middle East. The odontological analysis of these remains (Kazzazi, 2017, pp. 4, 55, 77–78, 202–203) suggests that the local population had been present in the region since earlier periods and supports the interpretation that the inhabitants represented local populations of Turkic origin.

Although archaeological research on the ancient city of Hasanlu has produced a number of important results, the ethnicity of the local population and political elite, as well as the main forms of economic activity and subsistence, have not yet been sufficiently studied. Some researchers emphasize Assyrian and Urartian military-political influences as more significant than local cultural traditions in the development of the city Hasanlu (Cifarelli & Castelluccia, 2023, p. 2). This situation makes it necessary to propose a broader interpretative framework for the study of Hasanlu.

Further investigation into the role of local Turkic populations in the historical development of Hasanlu may help clarify a number of unresolved questions in this field.

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