

*Categoria A*

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# MATERIALE ȘI CERCETĂRI DE TEREN – МАТЕРИАЛЫ И ПОЛЕВЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ – PAPERS AND SURVEYS

Najaf Museibli

## Child graves at Galayeri settlement of the Leilatepe culture

**Key words:** Azerbaijan, Chalcolithic period, migrations, Leilatepe culture, Galayeri settlement, child graves, burial vessels, burial customs.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Republica Azerbaidjan, perioada chalcolithică, migrații, cultura Leilatepe, așezarea Galayeri, morminte de copii, vase funerare, obiceiuri funerare.

*Najaf Museibli*

### Child graves at Galayeri settlement of the Leilatepe culture

In the 1980s, the archaeological culture of the same name was discovered in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan during excavations of the Chalcolithic settlement of Leilatepe. Since the early 21st century, thanks to the expansion of archaeological explorations, numerous settlements and tombs belonging to the Leilatepe culture have been discovered in the western region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in Karabakh, Mughan and Gabala, and extensive excavations have been carried out in many of them. It has been established that the Leilatepe culture emerged in the Late Chalcolithic period, end of the 5th millennium BC – beginning of the 4th millennium BC as a result of mass migrations from Eastern Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia to the South Caucasus. This culture lasted until the mid of the 4th millennium BC. With some exceptions, monuments belonging to this culture were mainly discovered in the territory of Azerbaijan. As a result of continued migrations from the Leilatepe culture area to the North Caucasus, the Maikop culture with the same ceramic traditions was formed there. Among the main indicators of the Leilatepe culture, the use of the potter's wheel in ceramic production and the infant burials in various types of pottery vessels can be especially noted. One of the most extensively excavated monuments belonging to this culture is the Galayeri settlement. The richest finds of the Leilatepe culture were discovered precisely in Galayeri. In all the monuments where extensive excavations were carried out related to this culture, child graves in pottery vessels were discovered. Such graves of the monuments belonging to the Leilatepe culture were mostly found in Galayeri.

*Najaf Museibli*

### Morminte de copii ale culturii Leilatepe din așezarea Galayeri

În anii 1980, cultura arheologică cu același nume a fost descoperită în regiunea Karabakh din Azerbaidjan în timpul săpăturilor din așezarea calcolitică Leilatepe. De la începutul secolului XXI, datorită extinderii explorărilor arheologice, numeroase așezări și morminte aparținând culturii Leilatepe au fost descoperite în regiunea de vest a Republicii Azerbaidjan, în Karabakh, Mughan și Gabala, iar în multe dintre acestea au fost efectuate săpături ample. S-a stabilit că cultura Leilatepe a apărut în perioada Calcoliticului târziu, sfârșitul mileniului V î.e.n. – începutul mileniului IV î.e.n., ca urmare a migrațiilor masive din Anatolia de Est și Mesopotamia de Nord în Caucazul de Sud. Această cultură a durat până la mijlocul mileniului IV î.e.n. Cu unele excepții, siturile aparținând acestei culturi au fost descoperite în principal pe teritoriul Azerbaidjanului. Ca urmare a migrațiilor continue din zona culturii Leilatepe către Caucazul de Nord, acolo s-a format cultura Maikop, cu aceleași tradiții ceramice. Printre principalii indicatori ai culturii Leilatepe se remarcă utilizarea roții olarului în producția de ceramică și înmormântările copiilor în diferite tipuri de vase de ceramică. Unul dintre cele mai excavate așezări aparținând acestei culturi este situl Galayeri. Cele mai bogate descoperiri ale culturii Leilatepe au fost descoperite tocmai în Galayeri. În toate așezările în care au fost efectuate săpături ample legate de această cultură, au fost descoperite morminte de copii în vase de ceramică. Astfel de morminte din siturile aparținând culturii Leilatepe au fost găsite mai ales în Galayeri.

### Introduction

The Leilatepe archaeological culture, which had an early agricultural-cattle-breeding economy, spread over vast areas of the South Caucasus, especially in the plain regions of Azerbaijan, in

the late 5th – mid 4th millennium BC. This dating has also been confirmed by radiocarbon analyses [Müseibli 2020, 216-220]. The main carriers of this culture, the Western Asian migrants, brought Eastern Anatolian-Northern Mesopotamian tra-

ditions to the South Caucasus, especially the production of round-bottomed vessels thrown on a potter's wheel and the custom of burying children in pottery vessels.

Extensive excavations have been carried out at the settlement of the same name in Karabakh belonging to Leilatepe culture, at the settlement of the same period in Agjabedi district, at the settlements Beyuk Kesik and Poylu II in Agstafa district in the middle Kura basin, at Soyubulag kurgans and other monuments. Graves in which infant burials in pottery jars were discovered in all these monuments [Aliiev, Narimanov 2001, 17-18; Museibli 2014, 49-59; Helwing 2012, 207-208; Museibli 2020, 97-108].

The excavations conducted at Galayeri settlement were of great importance in determining the main attributes of the Leilatepe culture. This monument is located in the north of Azerbaijan, at the foot of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, in Gabala district, in a plain zone, at an altitude of 342 m above sea level. In 2012-2018, excavations were carried out under the leadership of the author in Galayeri on an area of more than 400 sq/m. The thickness of the cultural layer varies between 2.7-3 m in different squares of the excavation area. The layer as a whole belongs to the Leilatepe culture [Museibli 2019, 65]. During excavations at Galayeri, 25 pottery graves were discovered, in which juvenile and infants were buried at various levels of the cultural stratum.

According to their technological characteristics the ceramic products of the Leilatepe culture, including the Galayeri monument, are divided into 4 groups. Group I includes mainly pink, red, orange, yellowish, rarely green, brown colored jars (pithos), and plate-type vessels made of plant-mixed clay. The number of vessels belonging to this group exceeds those belonging to all other groups. Vessels belonging to group II are made of clay with plant and sand admixtures. They are very close to group I in terms of typological features and color. Group III includes bowl and jar-type vessels, mainly of pink, rarely red and yellow color, made of pure clay. Group IV consists of jar (pithos), pots, and pan-type vessels, of brown and dark pink, rarely red color, made of clay with sand and other inorganic admixtures. The surface and neck of most of the jar-type vessels belonging to this group are worked from the inside with

a comb-like tool. The vessels of the first three groups, with occasional exceptions, were thrown on a potter's wheel, while the vessels of the fourth group were formed by hand. The bottom of vessels of all groups are round [Museibli 2020, 115-117].

On the surface of vessels of groups I, II and III, sometimes found marks consisting of "eye-shaped" signs and straight lines, which were made by potters with their nails before firing. The tradition of making these marks is connected with the origin of the Eastern Anatolian Chalcolith [Museibli 2016; Ağalarzadə 2018]. This tradition continued in the North Caucasus, in the example the Maikop culture [Korenevskii 1999].

In Galayeri vessels of group I, II and IV were used for burials.

#### Description of the graves

The graves in the settlement are numbered in the order of discovery (fig. 1).

*Grave No. 1* (fig. 2,1) was discovered at a depth of 1.1 m in the northeast corner of square 1B.

A narrow-mouthed burial jar was found on its side, with its mouth aligned to the west. Since the jar was broken by the weight on top, the bones inside were also mixed. Along with this, it was determined that the head of the skeleton was on the northwest side, the face was directed to the northeast, and the legs were extended to the southwest. Based on the preserved teeth, it is assumed to be about 1 year old.

The burial jar belongs to group I and has a round base and a conical body. It was made by hand from clay mixed with small chopped plants, and its surface is well smoothed. The rim of the jar is funnel-shaped and the top is horizontal. The surface is engobed in light grey. Since it was made asymmetrically, one side of the jar's body is more convex. On one side, near the bottom the wall is thin. It has a high body and the rim of the jar is slightly outflared. The lower part of the body is concave inward on one side. The broken bottom part of the jar was not found. Its height is 54 cm, the diameter of the body is 46 and 51 cm, and the diameter of the mouth is 23 cm.

*Grave No. 2* was discovered in square 1B, at a depth of 2 m. The burial vessel is medium-sized and belongs to group IV. The vessel is brown in color, has a round bottom, and its surface is "combed". The circumference of the vertically

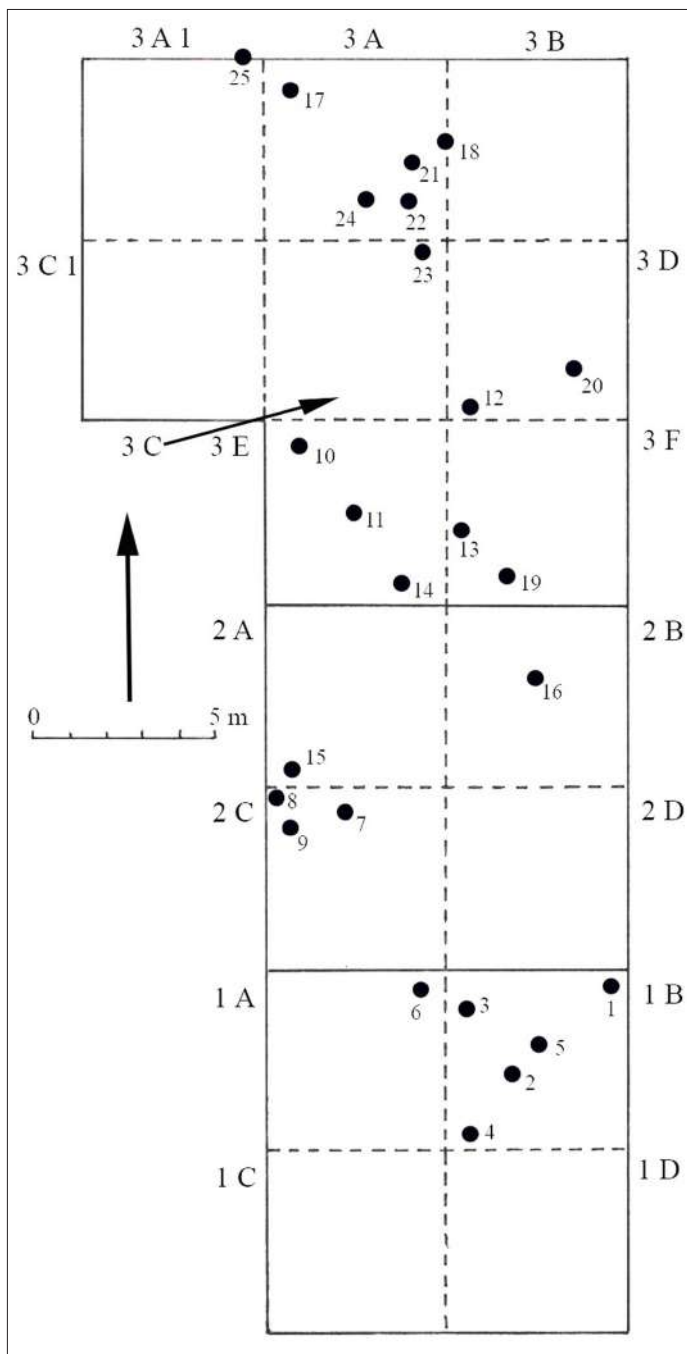


Fig. 1. Galayeri. Location of graves on the excavation site.

placed vessel was reinforced with straw mixed clay. The mouth and shoulder parts of the vessel were broken and filled in. It was not possible to determine the condition of the skeleton.

*Grave No. 3* (fig. 2,2) was discovered in the northwest corner of square 1B, at a depth of 1.2 m. Inside the jar belonging to group IV, a baby of about 4-5 months was buried with its head to the west, face to the north, on its back, with hands in its abdo-

men, and legs tightly folded. The top of this jar was covered with large, red jar fragments belonging to group I. These were covered with an arrangement of river stones.

*Grave No. 4* was discovered in the southwest of square 1 B, at a depth of 1.6 m. It was probably only a few days old and was buried in the north-south direction under a 15×15 cm jar fragment. Since the bones were so decayed, it was not possible to determine its exact position. The jar fragment used for the burial was red in color and neatly made by hand from sand mixed clay. The poorly fired jar has a salient modelling on the shoulder. Vessels with such patterns are generally found in occasional cases in the ceramics of the Leilatepe culture.

*Grave No. 5* was discovered in the center of square 1 B, at a depth of 1.9 m. The infant was buried in a large cauldron-type vessel. The mouth of the vessel, which was laid on its side, was facing south. The child was laid on its left side with its head to the west, and face to the north.

The burial vessel belongs to group IV, has a wide-mouthed cylindrical neck. It was made of sand mixed clay and poorly fired. The diameter of the mouth is 32 cm. The vessel with a flat seat and a biconical body is handmade. The inner and outer surfaces of this deep pink vessel are stained with black soot.

*Grave No. 6* was discovered at a depth of 2 m in the northeast of square 1A. The burial of a few-days-old baby was carried out inside a brown-colored jar, belonging to group IV. The burial jar was laid on its side with the mouth facing north. The head of the baby's skeleton was aligned to east, facing to south, and the feet were laid to south. The top of the burial jar was covered with a large red pitcher fragment belonging to group I, and several river stones were arranged around it.

The inner surface of the burial jar is light brown. The transition from the rim to the shoulder of the round-bottomed jar is gradual. The surface is stained with black soot. Its height is 27 cm, diameter is 25 cm.

*Grave No. 7* (fig. 3) was discovered in the northwestern part of square 2 C at a depth of 1.4

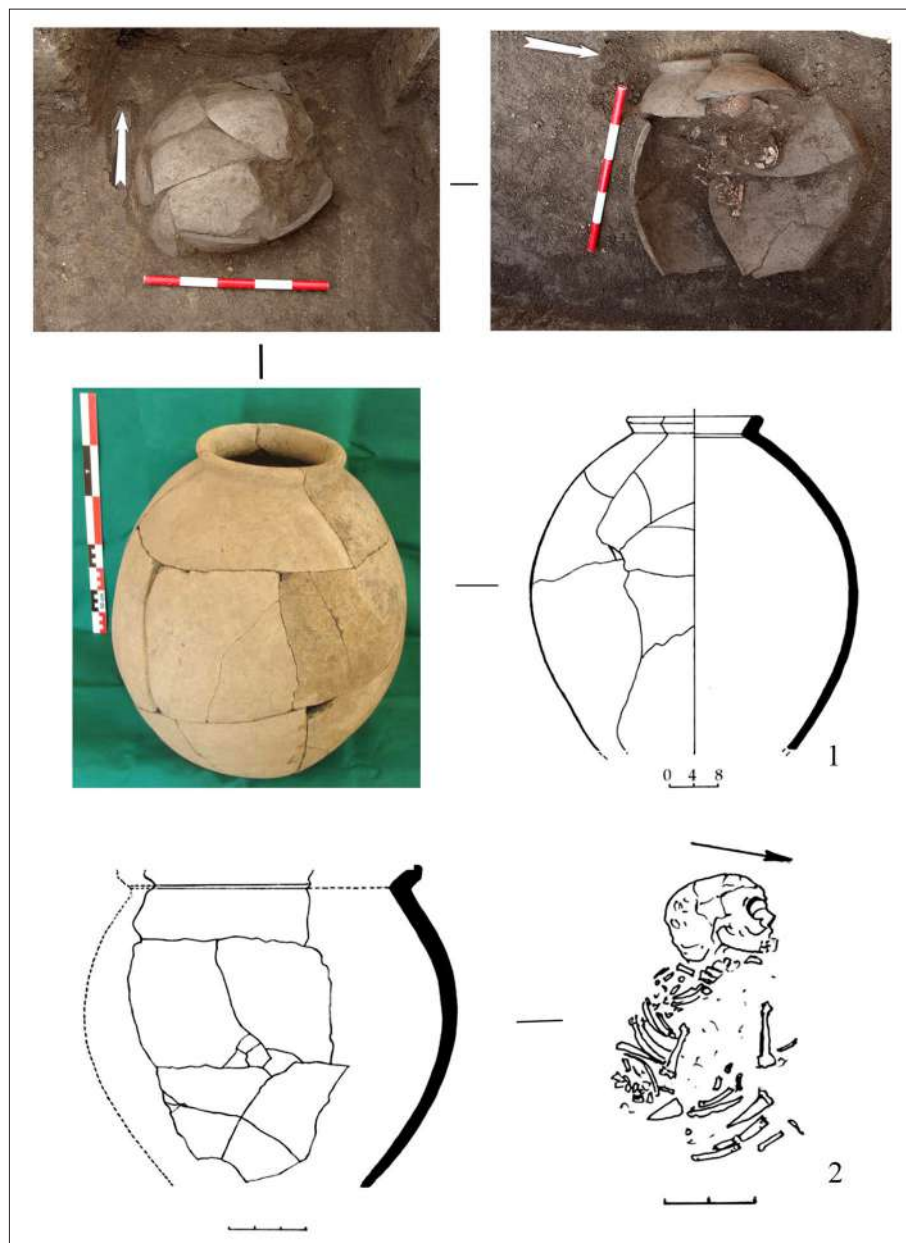


Fig. 2. 1 – Grave No. 1 and burial jar; 2 – Burial jar of grave No. 3 and the child skeleton discovered beneath it.

m. The burial was carried out in a jar belonging to group IV. The jar was laid on its side, its mouth facing to the northwest. The body of an approximately 8-9-month-old baby was buried in a tightly curled position inside the jar, lying on its left side, with its head to the southwest, its face to the northwest, and feet to the northeast. Half of an elongated, large jar belonging to group I was laid on top of the burial jar, with its mouth aligned in the opposite direction. A little more than half of a red jar was placed on top of this in the same direction. This jar was broken into small pieces due to

the weight of the soil on top.

The burial jar belonging to group IV in grave No. 7 has a convex body, thin walls, red inside and brown outside. The rim has a notched pattern. The transition from the rim to the shoulder is gradual. The lower part of the jar, made of sand mixed clay has not been discovered.

The second vessel above the burial jar is a large, red-colored one with a plant-based clay composition. The red-colored, narrow-necked vessel above it, broken into pieces. It is neatly made of fine sand-mixed clay. Before firing, a

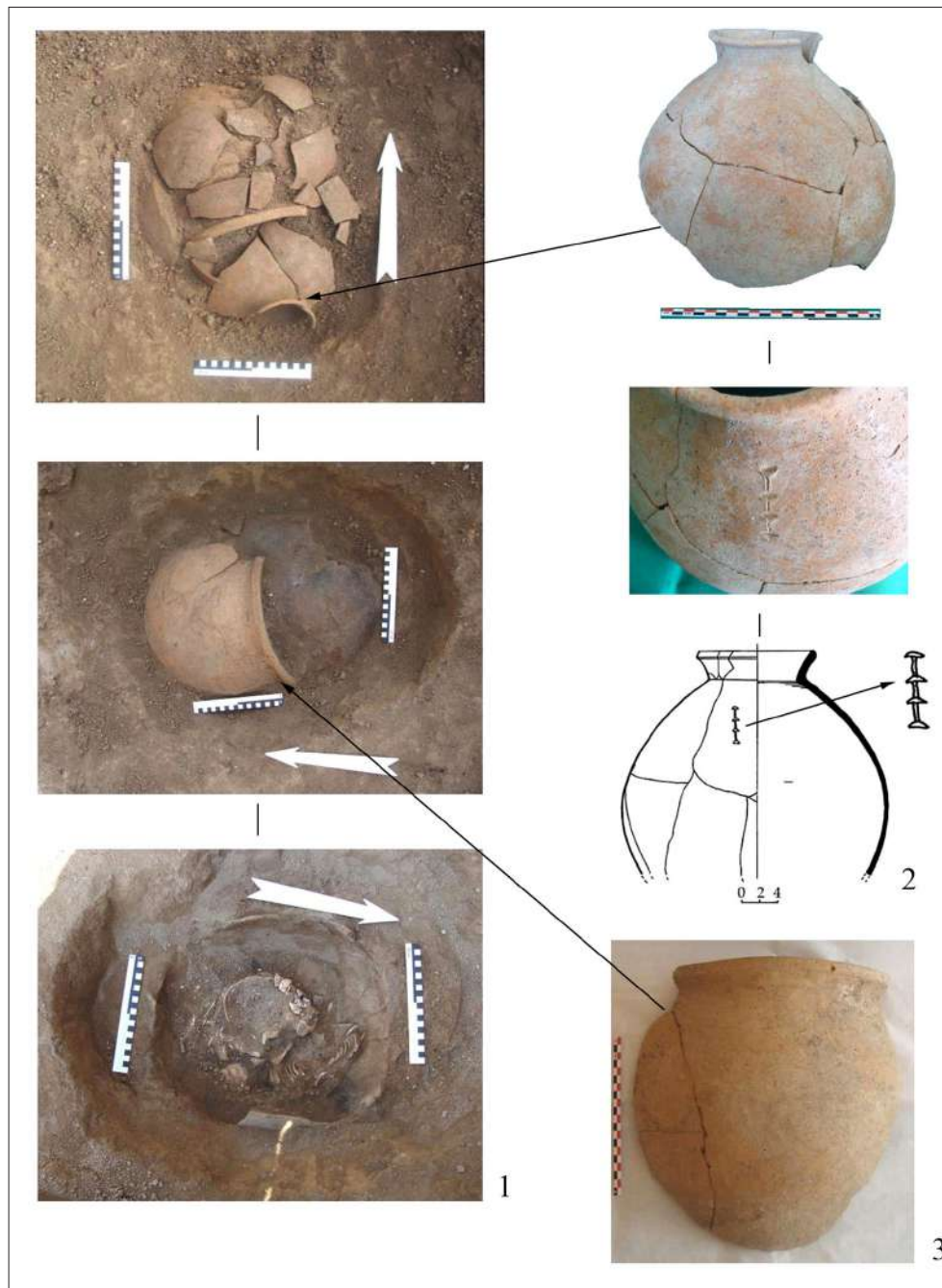


Fig. 3. 1 – Excavation stages of graves No. 7; 2, 3 – burial vessels of grave No. 7.

mark, specific to the Leilatepe culture was made on the shoulder of the vessel. This mark consists of a straight line drawn from top to bottom and four “eye”-shaped hallows made in a row above it (Fig. 3,2).

Grave No. 8 (fig. 4,1) was discovered at a depth of 1.4 m in the north-west corner of square C. The pink-colored, narrow-necked burial jar belonging to group I was found standing upright, but slightly

tilted to the east. Inside the jar, the skeleton of a child of about 1 year old was found lying on his right side, with his arms and legs tightly folded. His skull was towards the mouth of the vessel – in the northeast direction, facing northwest.

The burial jar (fig. 4,2) is pink in color, molded from plant mixed clay, and well-baked. The surface of the jar is engobed in pale green. The bottom of the round-bottomed jar was broken from the

side with a diameter of 10 cm, and the circumference of this fracture was slightly smoothed. Other parts of the bottom of the jar were broken and these fragments were not found in situ. The rim of the globular-bodied jar is funnel-shaped. The purposefully broken bottom of the jar is oriented to the southwest and is placed on half of a large plate. The diameter of the mouth of the jar is 31 cm, the height – 46 cm, and the diameter of the body – 41 cm. The plate placed under it (fig. 4,3) belongs to group I and is pink in color. The edge of the mouth is slightly convex.

As can be seen, the burial jar of grave No. 8 is identical to grave No. 3 excavated in Beyuk Kesik in that it is customary to break the bottom of the jar and to smooth it. In that grave, as mentioned above, the broken part of the jar placed on top of the burial jar was also smoothed on purpose. On the other hand, this grave in Galayeri is similar to grave No. 3 of Poylu II in that the burial jar was buried vertically and plate-type vessels were used here. The difference is that in Poylu II the mouth of the burial jar was buried downwards and two bowls were placed on top of it [Müseyibli 2020, 105].

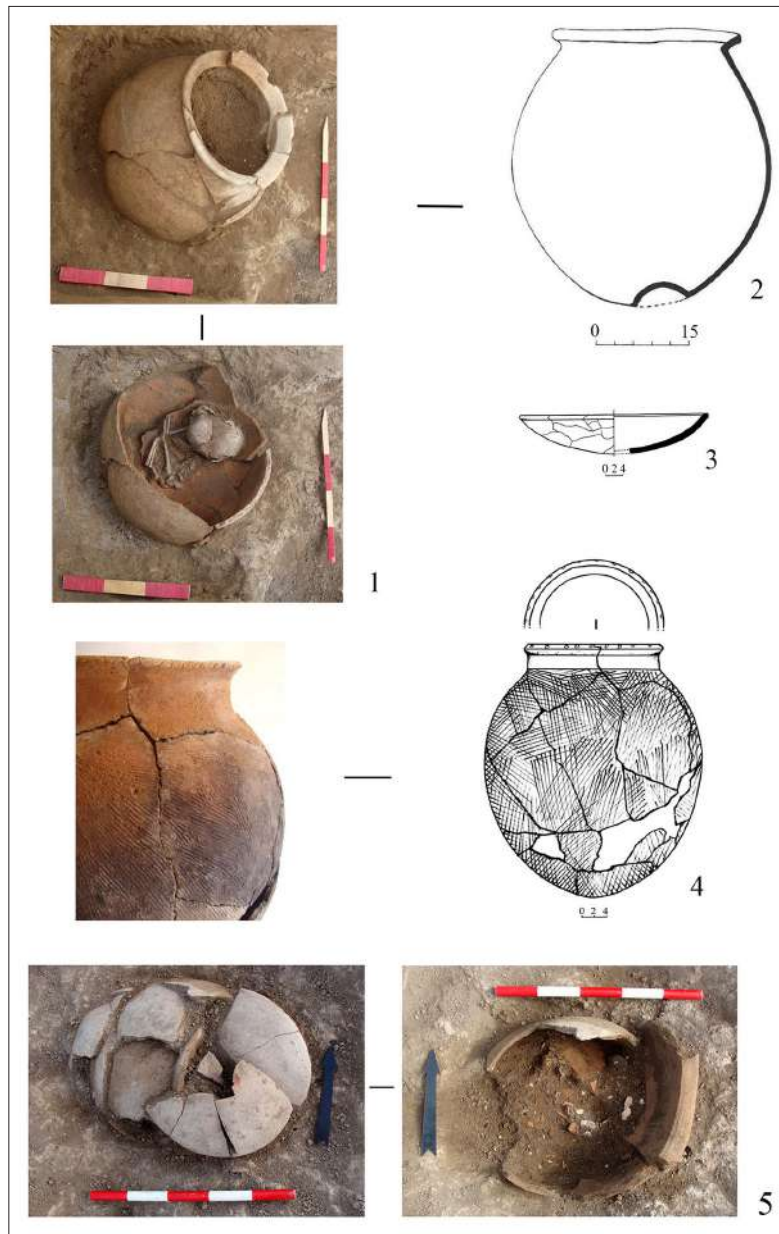


Fig. 4. 1 – Grave No. 8; 2, 3 – burial vessels of grave No. 8; 4 – burial vessel of graves No. 9; 5 – grave No. 12.

*Grave No. 9* was discovered directly next to grave No. 8, 40 cm southeast of it, at a depth of 1.8 m. The burial vessel belonging to group IV was laid on its side, with its mouth in a northeasterly direction. A child of about 1 year old was buried in the vessel, lying on its left side, tightly curled up, with its head towards the mouth of the vessel. Its face was towards south. The top of the burial vessel was covered on the south side with a large pitcher fragment belonging to group I.

The burial jar (fig. 4,4) is stained red-brown-black as a result of firing at an unstable temperature. Its wall is very thin – 0.5 cm. The entire surface below the neck has been “combed” in different directions with a comb-like tool. Although the bottom is round, it is slightly flattened. Some parts of the body were not found at the site. It seems that the jar was used for burial because it had become unusable. The upper part of the body is black. The neck is cylindrical and dark red. The outflared rim is decorated with sparse grooves on the outside. The height of the jar is 45 cm, the diameter of the body – 36 cm, and the diameter of the mouth – 24 cm.

*Grave No. 10* was discovered at a depth of 1.2 m to the northwest of square 3 E. The mouth of the jar was extended on its side to the south. Very small bone fragments were found inside. Since the bones were so decayed and mixed, it was not possible to determine the orientation of the skeleton.

*Grave No. 11* was discovered in the central part of square 3 E at a depth of 1.2 m. The burial was carried out inside a fragment of the body of a pink-colored jar belonging to group I. Here, an infant was buried in a bent position in a southeast-northwest direction. The bones were very decayed.

*Grave No. 12* (fig. 4,5) was discovered at a depth of 1.2 m in the southwest corner of square 3D. The burial jar belonging to group I was buried vertically, but slightly tilted to the east. It cracked into pieces due to the weight of the soil on top. The mouth of the jar was covered with a large plate-like vessel. Three marks were made on the plate in a row with a nail before it was baked. When the inside of the burial jar was cleaned, very decayed child bones were discovered in an irregular pattern. The remains of a skull were discovered near the mouth of the jar, on the east side.

*Grave No. 13* was discovered at a depth of 1.2 m to the west of square 3F. The pink-colored buri-

al jar belonging to group I was placed on its side in an east-west direction with its mouth facing west. A child of about 3-4 years old was buried in the jar on his right side up, folded up, his head aligned to the east, and his feet facing the mouth of the jar.

*Grave No. 14* was discovered at a depth of 1.2 m to the southeast of square 3E. A burial jar belonging to group IV was placed on his side with its mouth facing east. Inside it, a baby was buried with his head aligned to the mouth of the jar and his left side tightly curled up. The lower half of a thick-walled, spherical jar belonging to group I was placed on top of the burial jar. However, the burial jar gradually cracked and collapsed due to the weight of the soil on top, and half of the jar placed on top fell into the burial jar.

*Grave No. 15* (fig. 5,1) was discovered in the southwest corner of square 2A at a depth of 1.4 m. A large fragment of another jar belonging to the same group was placed on top of a “combed” burial jar belonging to group IV, with the mouth edge to the southwest. The tall burial jar was placed on its side, with its mouth to the northwest. Inside the jar, a child was buried on his right side, with his head towards the mouth of the jar.

*Grave No. 16* was discovered almost in the center of square 3B, at a depth of 1.4 m. After the body of a very young child was buried, it was covered with the lower half of a jar-type vessel (pithos). Since the skeleton was so decayed, it was not possible to determine its condition. Although the burial jar was large, it was thin-walled and reddish-pink in color. It had a round base and was made of pure clay. Vessels with such technological indicators are rarely found in the Leilatepe culture.

*Grave No. 17* was discovered at a depth of 1.4 m in the northwest of square 3A. The burial was carried out in a jar made of plant-mixed red clay. The jar was placed on its side, in a northwest-southeast direction and its mouth facing southeast. The jar was broken into pieces and fallen into itself. It was determined that the head of a very decayed child skeleton was on the mouth side of the jar.

*Grave No. 18* was discovered at a depth of 1.4 m at the junction of squares 3A and 3B. The infant was buried in a bent position inside a half of a pithos-type jar with its head facing southwest. The bones were very decayed and partially mixed. The jar used for the burial was made of red clay. It

has thin walls and a narrow mouth and made of plant-mixed clay.

*Grave No. 19* (fig. 5,2) was discovered in the southwest of square 3F. This grave, which dates back to the first period of settlement, differs from the others in its structure. Thus, the dark pink jar (pithos) of Group I selected for burial was buried in a pit dug in the mainland in a vertical position, but slightly tilted to the southeast. Only the upper part of the jar, 10 cm high, was in the cultural layer.

A small part was broken off under the round-bottomed jar and was not found in place. The mouth of the jar was discovered at a depth of 2.5 m. After the body of a child of about 2-2.5 years old was placed in a bent position at the bottom of the jar, the inside was filled with soil. Then the top of the jar was covered with a dome-shaped enclosure 10-12 cm thick and 45-50 cm high. The burial jar, made of plant-mixed clay, has a wide mouth and a convex body. The height of the jar is 50 cm, the

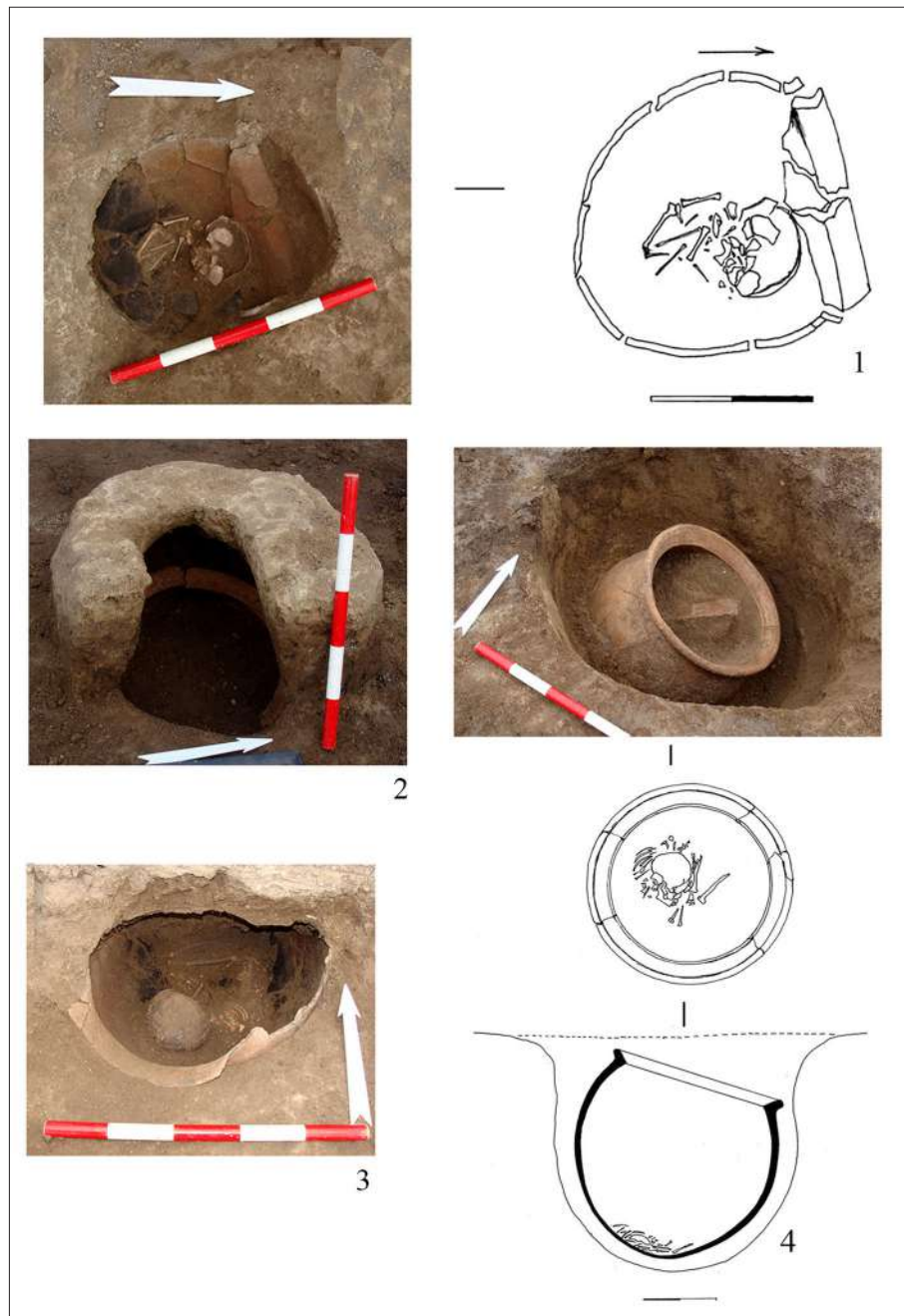


Fig. 5. 1 – Grave No. 15; 2 – Grave No. 19; 3 – Grave No. 24; 4 – Grave No. 20.

diameter of the mouth – 47 cm, and the diameter of the body – 53 cm.

*Grave No. 20* (fig. 5,4) was discovered in the southwest of square 3D. Grave chamber 80-85 cm in diameter and 70-75 cm deep was dug on the mainland, and the burial jar was placed there and then covered with soil. This soil was distinguished from the other soil of the cultural layer by its light yellowish color. After the 20 cm thick soil layer was cleared, the mouth of a large burial jar (pyphos) was discovered at a depth of 2.6 m. The wide-mouthed jar was tilted slightly to the east. Inside the jar filled with fine soil, another jar fragment was revealed at the upper level. At the bottom of the jar, a child of about 4-5 years old was buried in a bent position on its right side, facing northwest. Later, as a result of decay, the skull fell on other bones. The wide-mouthed, pink-colored burial jar was made of plant-mixed clay. Its height is 52 cm, body diameter – 56 cm, and its mouth diameter – 50 cm.

Graves 21, 22, 23 and 24 were located close to each other in squares 3A and 3C. Graves 21 and 22 were closer and were discovered directly to the north and south of the wall remains.

*Grave 21* was located almost in the center of square 3A. A 3-4 years old child was buried in a jar belonging to group IV. The jar was buried vertically, but with its mouth slightly directed to the east. The mouth of the jar was discovered at a depth of 2.1 m. After the child's body was placed in the jar, the mouth of the jar was covered with a large plate-like vessel. It was not possible to determine the arrangement of the child's bones inside the jar.

The burial jar was made of sand mixed clay. Despite its relatively large size, it has thin walls. The smooth outer surface is brown, and the inner surface is dark pink. The inner part of the throat was worked horizontally with a comb-like tool. The top of the rim is decorated with fingerprints. It is 43 cm high, the diameter of the mouth is 33 cm, and the diameter of the body – 45 cm. The plate-type vessel that covers the mouth of the jar belongs to group I and was made of plant-mixed clay, formed on a potter's wheel. Its diameter is the same as the size of the mouth of the jar.

*Grave No. 22* (fig. 6) was discovered in square 3A at a depth of 2.2 m. A burial chamber measuring 90×60 cm was dug at 60 cm deep. A large jar with its mouth facing east was placed onto the

floor of the chamber directly on the mainland. Inside the jar, a 7-8-year-old child was buried with its head facing east, on the left side, with legs and arms bent. Then the mouth of the jar was covered with a plate-type vessel and the top was poured with soil. As a result of gradual decay, part of the skull broke off and fell to the side.

The burial jar and the plate placed on its mouth were made of plant-mixed yellowish-pink clay, belonging to group I. The height of the jar is 67 cm, the diameter of the mouth – 32 cm, and the diameter of the body – 62 cm. Almost half of the plate is broken. There are four symmetrically arranged eye-shaped marks on it. A straight line connects two of these marks.

*Grave No. 23* was discovered in the north-eastern corner of square 3C. The thickness of the cultural layer here was 2.7 m. The mainland was cut 15 cm to place the burial jar. Accordingly, the burial jar was placed on its side in the north-south direction at a depth of 2.85 m, with its mouth facing north. Inside the jar, about 8-9 years old child was buried with its head facing north on its right side, tightly bent. As a result of decomposition, the skeleton was further compressed, and the skull was cracked into pieces. The skeleton was surrounded by a 7-8 mm thick black mass. It is possible that the corpse was wrapped in some material. The jar, broken into small fragments, belongs to group IV, is pinkish-brown in color, and the edge of the mouth is surrounded by embossed patterns.

*Grave No. 24* (fig. 5,3) was revealed in the south of square 3A, 60 cm west of grave No. 22, at a depth of 2.5 m. The burial jar was placed in a north-western direction. Inside it, a child of about 6-7 years old was buried with its head towards the mouth of the jar, on its left side tightly curled up. The relatively well-preserved bones were painted black due to the effect of the soot inside the jar. At the same time, the lower half of the jar was covered with black soot from the inside and outside. The pink-colored jar, belonging to group IV, is cracked into pieces. The rim of the mouth is decorated with hollows. Its height is 57 cm, the diameter of the mouth – 30 cm, and the diameter of the body – 47 cm.

*Grave No. 25* was revealed at a depth of 1.4 m in the northeast corner of square 3A1. The red burial jar belonging to group I was placed on its side in a west-east direction with its mouth facing

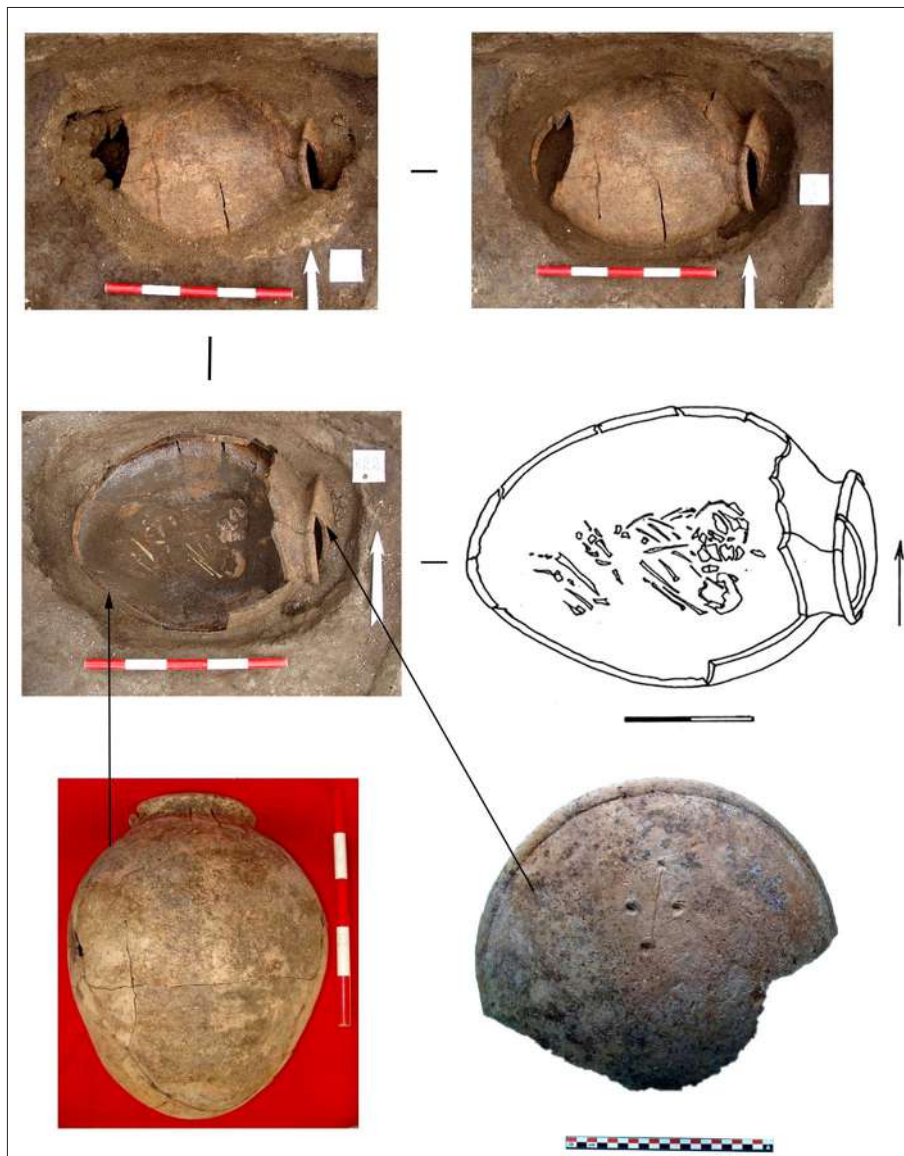


Fig. 6. Excavation stages and burial vessels of grave No. 22.

east. The bones of a baby child inside the jar were very decayed. However, it was possible to determine that the child was buried in a bent position on its right side and his head facing east.

#### Discussion and final provisions

Grave No. 25 was discovered at a depth of 1.4 m in the northeast corner of square 3A1. The red burial jar belonging to group I was placed on its side in a west-east direction with its mouth facing east. The bones of a baby inside the jar were very decayed. However, it was possible to determine that the child was buried in a bent position with his right side up and his head facing east.

Child graves in pottery jars have been discovered in many Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in the Near East. The earliest examples of such graves in the Near East have been found in northern Mesopotamia. They date back to the first phase of the Ceramic Neolithic period, the late 7th millennium BC, and were discovered at the settlements of Tell Sotto and Tell Khazna II [Bader 1989; Munchaev *et al.* 1993]. Such graves have also been discovered in Neolithic monuments in the Levant, the eastern Mediterranean region. The Ubaid culture, including its local version, the Northern Ubaid culture, which covered the northern territories of Mesopotamia, had separate necropolises where

the elderly were buried. The custom of burial more in residential settlements was widespread. Moreover, infants and young children were buried in jars under the floors of houses [Masson 1989, 87].

The custom of burying infants in pottery jars, which emerged in the Near East during the Neolithic period, spread to South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Such graves have been discovered here in settlements dating back to the 6th – 3rd millennia BC. In these graves, children up to 6.5 years old were buried in a rolled-up position on their sides. In three graves, the children were wrapped in thick cloth, leather or bast mat [Bychvarov 2009].

Graves containing pottery jars for infants' burrying have also been discovered in the Chalcolithic layers of the ancient settlements of Deyir mant and Pirot Höyük in eastern Türkiye. In these monuments, these graves – the pottery vessels – were placed both under the floors of houses – in pits dug in the mainland – and in the walls of houses [Esin 2000, 83; Akdeniz 2005].

The oldest pottery graves in the South Caucasus have so far been discovered in the layer of the Ovchular Tepe settlement in Nakhchivan, dating back to the end of the 5th millennium BC. Their number is up to 10 [Baxşəliyev *et al.* 2010; Marro, Yılmaz 2018]. There is no doubt that such a burial custom in this monument was related to the traditions of Eastern Anatolia-Northern Mesopotamia.

In the South Caucasus, with the exception of the Ovchular Tepe monument, all other pottery graves of the Chalcolithic period were discovered in the monuments of the Leilatepe culture. Their number is about 50. Almost half of these graves were discovered in the Galayeri settlement.

Only some of the pottery graves of the Near East have yielded finds consisting of ornamentals and other small objects. Such finds have also been found in several graves at Ovçular Tepe. In the pottery graves of the Leilatepe culture, including the Galayeri, no grave goods other than burial vessels and other vessels placed on them to complete the burial were found. It is likely that in the last stage of the Chalcolithic – in the Leilatepe culture – the custom of placing objects in such graves was eliminated.

The bones of children found in graves No. 3, 6 and 7 at Galayeri have been bioarchaeologically studied. Their age, nutrition, disease and causes of

death have been determined. In graves No. 3 and 6, 4-6-month-old babies were buried, and in grave No. 7, a 4-5-year-old child was buried. Acute vitamin C deficiency in their bodies caused scurvy and resulted in death. Comparison of the chemical and isotopic composition of the bones with the same indicators of the soil layer of the Galayeri monument from the Chalcolithic period has yielded interesting results. Thus, the chemical and isotopic indicators of the bones of the infants do not match the indicators of the contemporaneous soil structure of the Galayeri settlement. According to the current opinion, at least during pregnancy, teenage mothers lived in another region with their tribe before migrating to the territory of the Galayeri monument [Mednikova 2017, 94-101; Mednikova *et al.* 2018, 197-208]. This fact gives reason to assume that during the mentioned period, migrations from Western Asia to the South Caucasus, as well as migrations to the same settlement, continued regularly.

A number of researchers have put forward the idea that the burials in pottery vessels are the graves of children sacrificed for the buildings [Antonova 1990, 86]. However, excavations conducted in the settlements of Beyuk Kesik I, Galayeri and Soyuqbulag kurgans show that this idea is incorrect. In any case, such a conclusion cannot be attributed to the Leilatepe culture. Thus, graves No. 3, 4 and 5 in Beyuk Kesik I were discovered compactly on the very edge of the settlement, in a place where there were no buildings. In Galayeri, several pottery graves (No. 19, 20, 22, etc.) belong to the first period of the settlement and were placed in a chamber dug directly on the mainland. These graves have no connection with any building. Besides, as mentioned, child burials in pottery vessels were also found in the Soyuqbulag kurgan field. There, these graves were discovered in the cover of some burial kurgans and in the areas between the burial kurgans [Museibli 2014, 62].

The orientation of the graves of the Leilatepe culture we are talking about is taken mainly on north, west and northwest. Interestingly, the orientation of the graves consisting of clay pots and the burials under the kurgans discovered in Soyuqbulag is also northwest-southeast, north-south. All this indicates the existence of certain rules in the choice of direction (northwest) in the burial customs of the Leilatepe culture tribes. Most

likely, northwest was the direction determined for the burial ceremony. In some cases, the north or west direction of the graves or skeletons was a random deviation from the northwest direction and was not intentionally implemented [Müseyibli 2020, 111]. The orientation of the graves at the Tepe Qawra settlement in northern Mesopotamia was also northwest-southeast [Tobler 1950, plate XXVI-XXVII]. It seems that this burial custom spread to the Caucasus from Northern Mesopotamia [Museibli 2022, 110].

However, unlike other monuments of the Leilatepe culture, there is no stable orientation observed in the child graves in pottery jars discovered in Galayeri. Only a few of the graves dug here are oriented northwest. Some are oriented

north-south. The northwest-southeast direction of the graves was associated with Northern Mesopotamian traditions. The Galayeri monument, on the other hand, reflects more Eastern Anatolian traditions. In this regard, it should be noted that the vertically buried burial jars in Galayeri are oriented east. Besides, the burial jars placed on their sides are also oriented east-west. Perhaps the east direction had a certain place in the burial customs of the Galayeri residents.

The Galayeri settlement and the pottery graves discovered here are monuments that more clearly demonstrate the connection of the Late Chalcolithic Leilatepe culture of the South Caucasus with Western Asia, especially Eastern Anatolia.

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