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# ҚАЗАҚ ТАРИХЫ KAZAKH HISTORY

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ЖАҢА ЖӘНЕ  
ҚАЗІРГІ ЗАМАН ТАРИХЫ

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NEW AND MODERN  
HISTORY

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## NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES RELATED TO THE HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

**Abstract.** The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic boasts a rich history, with every corner and stone bearing traces of its past. Archaeological findings from settlements in this region hold significant importance for Azerbaijani archaeology. Studying these artifacts provides new insights into the lifestyles and economic activities of the people who once inhabited Nakhchivan. In this context, medieval archaeological discoveries from Nakhchivan's settlements are of particular scientific value. Research indicates that these artifacts were not random but served specific purposes. Differences in the forms and features of these objects suggest they were products of distinct workshops.

**Keywords:** Nakhchivan, artifact, column bases, human figure.

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## Жаңа археологиялық табыстар, Әзірбайжанның орта ғасырлар тарихына қатысты

**Аннотация.** Нахчыван Автономиялы Республикасы бай тарихқа ие. Бұл өнірдің әрбір бұрышы мен әрбір тасы өз ішінде тарихтың іздерін сақтайды. Осы аймақ, қоныстарынан табылған археологиялық олжалар Әзербайжан археологиясы үшін үлкен маңызға ие. Бұл табыстарды зерттеу кезінде бір кездері Нахчыванда өмір сүрген адамдардың тұрмыс-тіршілігі мен шаруашылық қызметі туралы жаңа мәліметтер алуға болады. Осы тұрғыда Нахчыван өніріндегі қоныстардан табылған Орта ғасырлар кезеңіне жататын археологиялық олжалардың ғылыми маңызы бар. Зерттеулер далалық, жұмыстар мен кітапханалық ізденістер арқылы жүргізілді. Жұмыс нәтижесінде бұл археологиялық олжалар кездейсок, емес, белгілі бір мақсатта қолданылғаны анықталды. Зерттеу барысында осы археологиялық нысандардың пішіндері мен ерекшеліктеріндегі айырмашылықтар олардың жеке шеберханалардың туындылары болғанымен түсіндірілетіні белгілі болды.

**Түйін сөздер:** Нахчыван, артефакт, баған негіздері, адам мүсіні.

**Сілтеме үшін:** Халилов Т. Жаңа археологиялық табыстар, Әзірбайжанның орта ғасырлар тарихына қатысты. // Қазак тарих электронды ғылыми журналы. 2025. Т. 186. № 2. 30-40 бб. (Ағыл.). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62183/2025-2-6-24>

## Introduction

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic possesses a favorable natural and geographical location, as well as an ancient and rich history. Every inch of its land and every stone hides a piece of history. Archaeological findings discovered during excavations in this region hold scientific significance for Azerbaijani archaeology. Their study provides new insights into the lifestyle and economic activities of the people who once inhabited the territory of Nakhchivan. In this context, particular scientific interest

is drawn to such artifacts from medieval archaeological sites in the Nakhchivan region as a stone column base, human images carved in stone, an eleven-pointed geometric pattern, and a copper coin.

## Materials and Methods

The column base was found in the city of Nakhchivan. An octagonal geometric ornament was carved into its surface (Fig. 1). We conducted a study dedicated to the meaning and distribution of this geometric pattern. During the research, it was

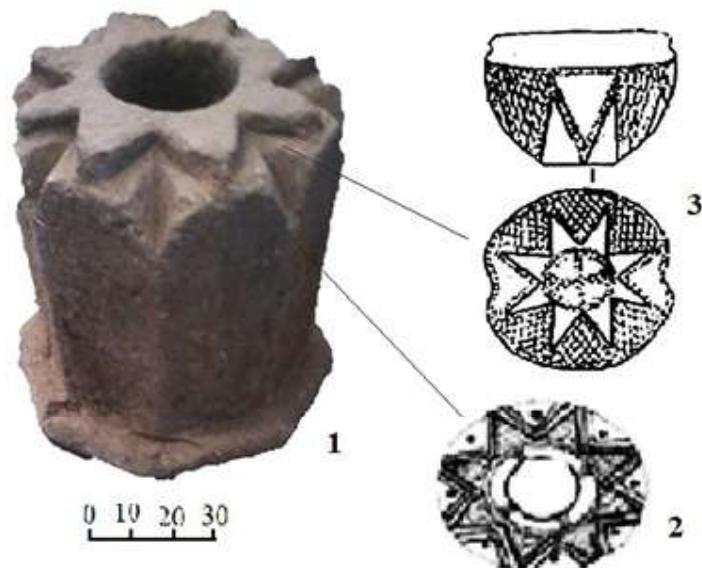
determined that similar ornaments appear on ceramic fragments from the Middle Bronze Age found in Nehechir (Fig. 3) [Rzayev, 2013: 112], on a clay vessel from Kultepe II (Fig. 4) [Baxşəliyev, 2004: 165], on petroglyphs of Southern Azerbaijan [Naserifard, 2009: 44], in Azerbaijani and Anatolian carpets, in the architectural elements of the mausoleums of Yusif ibn Kuseyir and Gulustan, on the flag of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in other artifacts. All of these carry specific symbolic meanings and semantics.

### Discussion and Results

When studying the semantics of this geometric ornament, it becomes clear that it symbolizes the sun. Different forms of its execution have their own symbolic meanings. The octagonal image of the sun on the column base also carries specific semantic significance. According to sources, the eight-pointed star has a wide range of symbolic meanings. According to some sources, it represents the eight branches of the Turkic people. The eight-pointed star also symbolizes the eight letters of the Arabic alphabet that form the word “Azerbaijan.” Moreover, it can represent success, faith, Turkic identity,

Islam, modernity, equality, and the eight gates of paradise [Ağasioğlu, 2014: 88]. In some sources, it is noted that the image of an eight-pointed star within a circle placed in a square symbolizes cosmic balance, the connection between heaven and earth, a transitional stage, as well as infinity and eternal development. In Sumerian mythology, the number eight was considered sacred due to the myth of the Great Flood, which lasted seven days and nights, after which, on the eighth day, the sun god Utu sent warmth to the earth [Kramer, 1999: 174]. It can also be assumed that the eight points symbolize a schematic representation of the globe, indicating the cardinal and intermediate directions: north, south, east, west, northwest, northeast, southwest, and southeast. All these directions together form the shape of an eight-pointed star.

Particular attention is given to anthropomorphic figures in the study of their distribution. In this context, it is worth noting that, in addition to Nakhchivan, similar anthropomorphic figures have been discovered at many archaeological sites across Azerbaijan. Such figures can be seen in Ganja [Muradova, 1979: 12–41], Karabakh (Ilanlytepe), Gazakh (Shomutepe, Kargalartytepe), Tepe-Sarab, and Merlik [İbrahimov, 2013: 112–115] (Fig. 3).



**Figure 1 – 1 – Nakhchivan city (Khalilov T.); 2 – Nahajir [Rzayev, 2013];  
3 – Kultepe II [Baxşəliyev, 2004].**

A carved stone human figure (Fig. 2) was discovered underground during work at the Meydan Juma Mosque (16th–18th centuries) in the village of Tivi, Ordubad district. During the mosque’s construction work, another stone artifact with a schematic image of a human figure was also found (Fig. 5, 1).

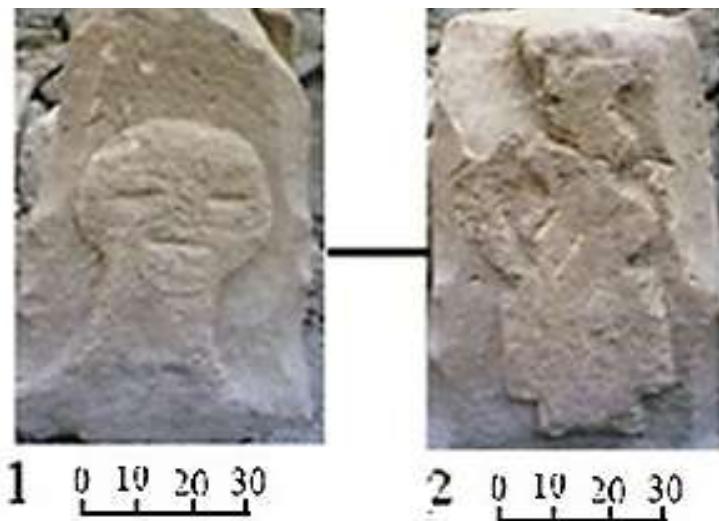


Figure 2 – Stone human figures in the Meydan jami (Khalilov T).

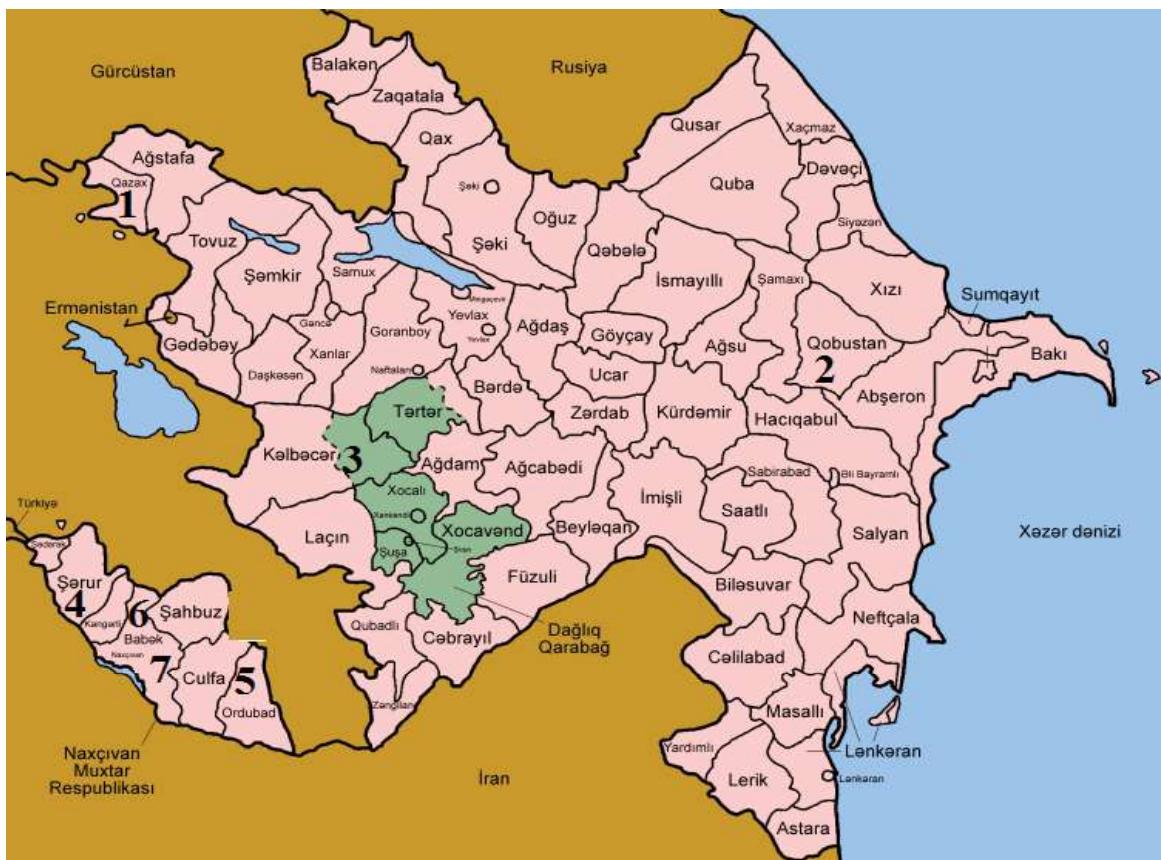


Figure 3 – Distribution of anthropomorphic figures in Azerbaijan  
(1-Kazak, 2-Kobustan, 3-Karabakh, 4-Sharur, 5-Ordubad, 6-Babek, 7-Nakhchivan) (Khalilov T).

In addition to Azerbaijan, anthropomorphic figures have been discovered in various parts of the world (Fig. 4), including Western, Eastern, and Central Europe (Dolní Věstonice, Předmostí, Petřkovice, Pekárna, Brno), France (Dordogne, Laussel), Russia (Yeliseevichi) [Yetilmezsoy, 2006: 100–153], as well as in the cultures of

Halaf, Anau, Kormo [Masson, 1973: 101], Samara, Khatun [Ağasıoğlu, 2014: 115], Anatolia (Çatalhöyük, Dündartepe, Hacılar) [Oral, 2014: 154–164], Karahantepe, Şanlıurfa, Göbeklitepe, Norşuntepe [Yetilmezsoy, 2006: 112], and others. These figures were made of clay, bone, ivory, or limestone.

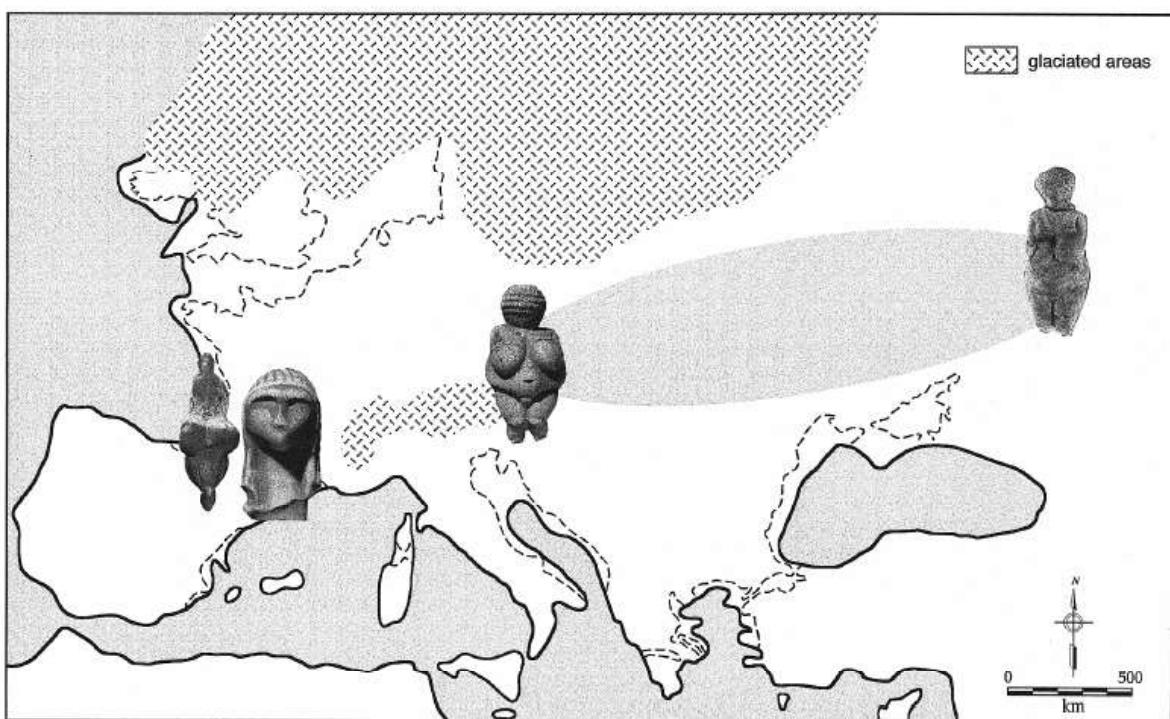


Figure 4 – Distribution of anthropomorphic figures [Yetilmezsoy, 2006].

Anthropomorphic figures differ from one another and are known by various names such as “Venus,” “balbal,” “stone father,” “stone mother,” “bengudash,” “bediz,” “toz,” and others. The oldest anthropomorphic figure is a female figure. During the Paleolithic era, a figure was discovered near the village of Willendorf in Austria and was named the Venus of Willendorf after the site where it was found [Szombathy, 1909: 85–88]. Research has shown that Venus figurines include examples such as the Venus of Willendorf, Venus of Laussel, and Venus of Savignano. Some scholars have suggested that the Venus of Laussel may have represented a female shaman aiding in hunting or may have been used as a magical object for fertility. According to some sources, anthropomorphic figures referred to as “Venus” indicate that belief in the “Great God-

dess” emerged long before the era of productive economies [Yetilmezsoy, 2006: 110–153].

One of the most important archaeological findings that confirm the cult of the “Great Goddess” is an anthropomorphic figure discovered in Çatalhöyük, dating to the Neolithic period (8000–5500 BCE). This stone figure, depicting a woman seated on a throne, is considered key evidence of this cult. A statue of the Great Goddess found at the Hacılar-Höyük settlement near Burdur and dated to 8500–5500 BCE has a similar form—representing a pregnant woman, much like the figure from Çatalhöyük. At the Murat-Höyük settlement, dated to 2500–2200 BCE, five stylized anthropomorphic figures made of fired clay were found in the fourth cultural layer. These figures feature small holes for eyes and mouth, prominent brow ridges,

and a pronounced nose, but ears are not depicted. The head tilts backward, has a conical shape, and lacks decorative elements that might indicate a hairstyle or headdress. The arms are partially represented, directed either forward or inward. Anthropomorphic figures have also been found in Karahantepe, Şanlıurfa, Göbeklitepe, Pulur-Sakyol, and Norşuntepe. At Pulur-Sakyol, dating to the second phase of the Early Bronze Age, and at Norşuntepe, from the third phase [Abdulkadir, 2020: 99–104], male figures were discovered. The lowest cultural layer (Layer III) of the Göbeklitepe site is dated to 9100 BCE. This layer revealed stylized monolithic pillars, about 5 meters tall, which are considered the earliest known examples of human figuration from that time [Uzunel, 2024: 33–34].

When examining the purposes of anthropomorphic figures found in various parts of the world, it becomes clear that the earliest human representations most commonly depict women and are often associated with the period of “matriarchy.” In most cases, arms, legs, and faces are schematically rendered, while other features are highlighted in more detail. The reason why the earliest human figures found in settlements around the world depict women is that, in ancient times, women were regarded as the creators of lineage, guardians of the hearth, and sources of divine power, fertility, prosperity, purity, and sanctity. They held a central place in people’s religious and ideological beliefs.

With the emergence of “patriarchy” during the Early Bronze Age, men began to play a more prominent role in economic activities and tribal leadership. As a result, male figures also gained importance in religious-ideological systems and mythological worldviews. These figures symbolized strength and resilience. Just like female figures reflected belief in the “Great Goddess,” male figures were associated with the cult of ancestors. According to sources, the ancestor cult held a significant place in the religious and ideological beliefs of people in many parts of the world, including Azerbaijan. Researchers such as R. Alizade, N.N. Yefimenko, R.K. Balandin, S.A. Tokarev, A. Shukurov, K. Huseynoglu, and others have studied this topic and expressed various views. S.A. Tokarev considered the ancestor cult a distinct form of religion and emphasized its prominent place in the religious-ideological views and spiritual culture of the Turkic peoples. According to him, the presence of female figurines around the hearth symbolized the woman as the keeper of the fire and head of the household and indicated their use in specific rituals [Tokarev, 1990: 29–30].

Similarly, R.K. Balandin stated that the abundance of female figures around the hearth symbolized the woman as the leader and heir of the tribe and suggested their role in religious rituals [Balandin, 2002: 216]. R. Alizade, citing examples from Turkic epics such as Oguz-Kagan and The Creation of the World, emphasized that the ancestor cult played a vital role in the religious-ideological beliefs of the Turks both before and after the adoption of Islam [Alizade, 2008: 100]. A. Shukurov [Şükürov, 2005: 45] and S. Rzasoy [Rzasoy, 2007: 141] asserted that the ancestor cult associated with Oguz-Kagan occupied a special place in Turkic mythology and ideological views. L.N. Gumilev, who also studied this topic, highlighted the widespread prevalence of the ancestor cult among the Altai Turks [Gumilev, 1993: 76].

The theory that ancestor worship or the ancestor cult forms the foundation of all world religions is often attributed to Herbert Spencer. He was influenced by the idea that “the ancestor cult is the root of all religions” [Altın, 2018: 22]. In addition to Spencer, researchers such as Tylor, Frazer, Eliade, Freud, Radcliffe-Brown, Fustel, Swanson, Meyer Fortes also studied this issue. James G. Frazer, Durkheim, and Evans-Pritchard explored the ancestor cult based on the concept of the hero and his status. Ruth Benedict, W. Edward, Fascholle-Luc, Dapila, Bloch, and M. Enani examined the ancestor cult in the context of ideological systems. Scholars such as Yörükhan, Ch. Velikhov, Lev Nikolayevich Gumilev, Inan, Snesarev, I. Stebleva, S.G. Klyashtorny, and Mayramgul Dyykanbayeva developed theological approaches to explain the ancestor cult [Altın, 2018: 21–52]. During the study of the semantics of the eleven-pointed image engraved within a circle on a stone found at the Meydan Juma Mosque (Fig. 5, 2), it was determined that similar images appear on ceramics, gravestones, and other objects in various locations. These images, shaped as decagons, hendecagons (eleven-sided), dodecagons, etc., can be linked to the solar cult.

During archaeological excavations related to the Medieval period of Nakhchivan, a bird-shaped artifact was discovered in the southern part of a settlement. This settlement is located near the village of Tivi in the Ordubad district, on the right bank of the Gilanchay River, above the road, at the site known as Guney. The stone figure found at this location has a flat base and a narrow upper part, resembling the shape of a bird. There is a small hole at the top of the figure. Based on burn marks around the hole, it can be assumed that this figure was used in a specific ritual ceremony.

To support this hypothesis, we can refer to sources that indicate various beliefs associated with birds existed within the religious-ideological views and mythological worldview of ancient peoples. For this reason, bird images in various forms are often found on ceramic artifacts, stones, carpets, and other archaeological objects. Some pendant ornaments were also crafted in the shape of birds (Fig. 6).

The reason birds hold a special place in the religious-ideological beliefs of people and in mythological perception lies in the belief that the gods dwell in the sky. Birds were considered beings en-

dowed with divine power, and thus held an important position in people's religious and mythological representations. Birds of prey symbolized strength and power, while non-predatory birds symbolized joy and good news. Birds regarded as symbols were most often birds of prey. In Hittite culture, the eagle was considered a creature dwelling in the heavens [Alp, 2009: 33–34]. In the culture of Antalya, the eagle symbolized authority and strength [Eyüboğlu, 2018: 119]; the goddess Athena [Kabaağacı, 1995: 61]; the raven symbolized misfortune, while the owl symbolized good luck [Boratav, 1973: 73].

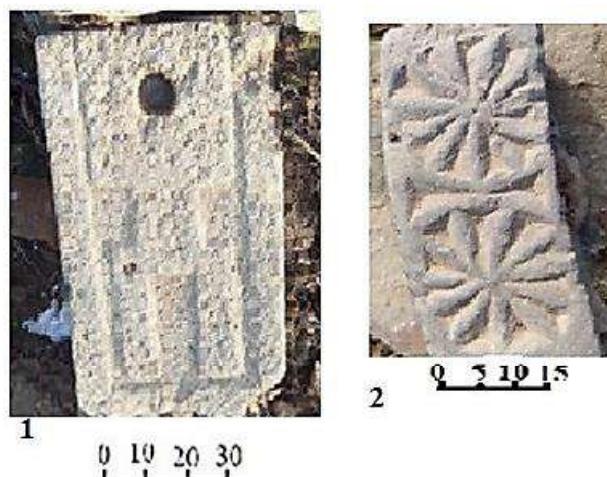


Figure 5 – Stone artifacts in the Meydan jami (Khalilov T).

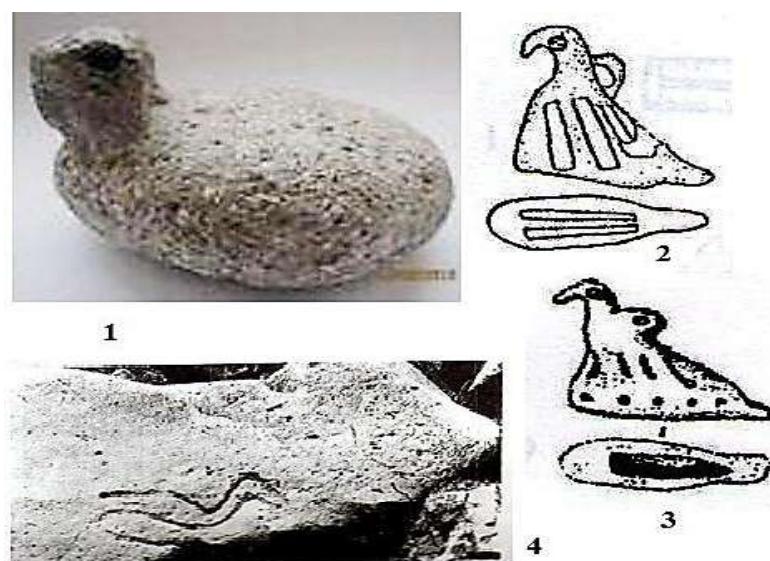
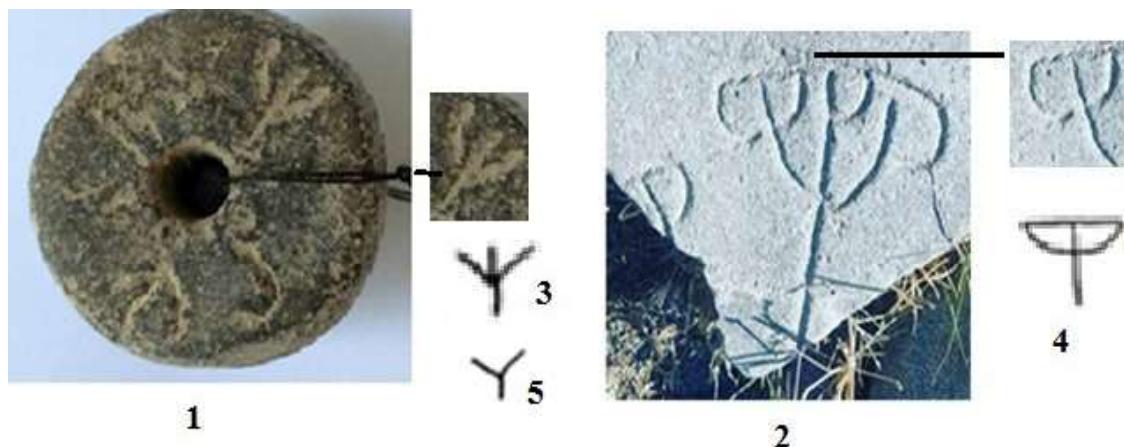


Figure 6 – 1- Stone artifacts in the settlement of Güney (Khalilov T);  
2- Earring from the necropolis of Kolany (Baxşəliyev, 2004); 3- Earring from the necropolis of Mindzuklutepe (Aslanov, et al., 2003); 4- Gravestone from the necropolis of Saridere (Baxşəliyev, 2004).

In ancient Turkic culture, birds were considered ongons (spiritual totems or sacred animals). Each of the twenty-four Oghuz tribes had its own bird ongon. For example, the Bayat tribe's ongon was the owl, the Yazir tribe's was the eagle, the Yasir tribe's was the red falcon, the Dodurga tribe's was the eagle, the Yaparli tribe's was the çalagan (a type of hawk), the Begdilli tribe's was the crow, the Chepni tribe's was Humay, the Ürüger tribe's was the owl, the Kynyk tribe's was the crow, the Ava tribe's was the falcon, and the Igdir tribe's was the eagle, and so on [Əbulqazi, 2002: 70–72]. B. Ögel, categorizing the ongons by tribes and clans, notes that for the Chebni-Shungar tribe, the ongon was Humay. The researcher states that “the legendary name of the bird hüma/humay was also given to actual bird species. For example, in Crimea, huma or humay was

the name for one of the best breeds of eagles. In the Kyrgyz dialect, this bird was called ‘kumay.’ The Kyrgyz referred to the largest bird of the vulture family as ‘kumay’” [Ögel, 1993: 365].

One of the stone artifacts from the medieval period discovered in the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was found in the Julfa district. A schematic image was engraved on it (Fig. 7, 2). In the course of the semantic analysis of this image, it was determined that certain features of this type of image—resembling the Tree of Life—appear on a tool discovered at the Delme fortress [İbrahimli, Səfərli, Yusifova, 2015: 76–77], in the tamgas (tribal emblems) of the Salur and Chepni tribes [Kramer, 1999: 51], as well as in petroglyphs of the Proto-Turkic culture found in Bulgaria [Yengi, 2013: 70].



**Figure 7**—Clay artifacts in the Delme fortress [İbrahimli, Səfərli, Yusifova, 2015];  
2—Stone artifacts in the Julfa region (Khalilov T.).

One of the archaeological finds of particular significance for the study of the medieval history of Nakhchivan is a copper coin discovered in the village of Tivi (Fig. 8). This copper coin, weighing 5.96 grams, features the image of a bird on one side and an inscription on the other. During research conducted on this coin, the word “zerbi” was partially deciphered on one part of the inscription. However, other parts are damaged and difficult to read, making it challenging to draw any definitive conclusions at this time.

By conducting a comparative study of the bird image on the coin, it is possible to attempt to deter-

mine its historical period. As a result of this comparative analysis, we concluded that such copper coins were used in the 18th century during the Safavid Empire [Rajabli, 2014: 178], as well as in the khanates of Ganja and Iravan. Considering that many similar copper coins were in circulation during the 18th century, it can be assumed that the coin found in the village of Tivi also dates back to that period. We believe that the main difference between this coin and those from the Safavids or the Ganja and Iravan khanates lies in the fact that it was minted in a local mint.



**Figure 8** – 1-Copper coin found in the village of Tivi (Khalilov T); 2-Copper coin of the Ganja Khanate, 3-Copper coin of the Irivan Khanate; 4-Copper coin of the Safavid state [Раджабли, 2014].

During archaeological survey research conducted in the Julfa district, in a place called Naldərə, new petroglyphs were discovered, engraved on six large stones. The study revealed that each of these images was created intentionally and holds a specific semantic meaning. To substantiate this conclusion, the images were analyzed comparatively with petroglyphs found in different regions of the world.

The research established that the symbols carved into the stones – including an arrow ( $\rightarrow$ ), interlocked double circles ( $\odot$ ), a symbol resembling a Roman numeral (Y), inward-curving ends ( $\curvearrowleft$ ), outward-facing ends ( $\curvearrowright$ ), and sword-like ornaments ( $\kappa$ ) – each carry distinct semantic meanings. Comparative analysis shows that the arrow symbol ( $\rightarrow$ ) is widely seen among Turkic tamgas (tribal emblems) that spread from Anatolia to Europe. In the Orkhon-Yenisei script, this symbol represented the sound “k” [Gülensov, 1989: pp. 7, 12, 13]. In the work Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh, a similar symbol is described as the tamga of the Bayat tribe of the Oghuz Turks [Reşidü’d-din, 2014:100]. Researcher A. Qurbanov also notes that such a symbol appears in the work Hünarnāme as the tamga of the Bayat branch of the Oghuz [Qurbanov, 2013:272].

In the study of the semantics and distribution of the double-interlocked circle sign ( $\odot$ ), it was found that such symbols appear among artifacts from the Pazyryk kurgans. In Proto-Turkic culture, some Turkic ethnic groups used this sign as a tamga. In this context, these signs were known as yuyan (suluk) or “double eye.” Similar double-circle engravings have also been discovered in the petroglyphs of Gemigaya, Anatolia, the Altai region, Siberia, and Mount Gegham. These images, which also appear in Gemigaya, date to the Bronze Age and, according to some sources, symbolize night and day.

According to the mythology of the Siberian Turks, symbols consisting of dots represent stars, while double circles symbolize the planet Venus. Through a comparative study of the distribution and semantics of the diamond-shaped symbol ( $\diamond$ ), it was determined that in Western sources, this schematic symbol is known as the “two-columned upsilon” (a letter of the Greek alphabet) [Okladnikova, 1989: 46–308]. Despite differing opinions, the common theme across these interpretations is that all such images are primarily linked to astral (celestial) beliefs.

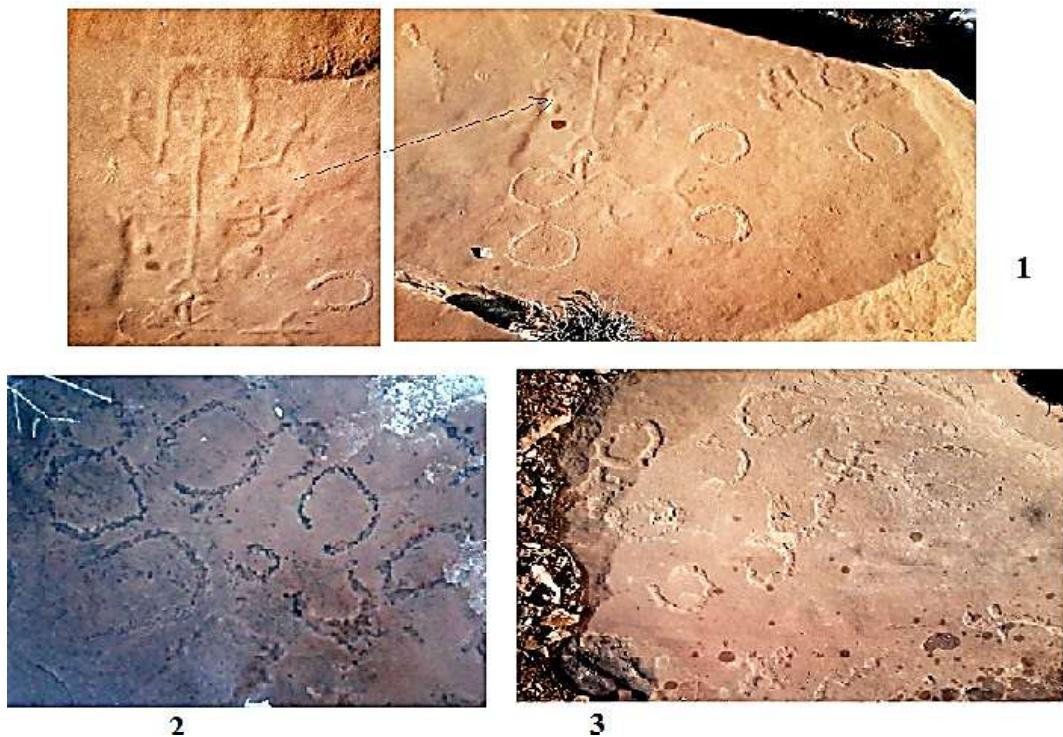


Figure 8 – Petroglyph in the Naldere (Khalilov T.)

This symbol is found not only in Azerbaijan but also in the cities of Derbent and Humara, as well as among the material culture monuments of Turkey. According to Mahmud Kashgari's work *Divanu Lugat-it-Turk*, this sign is the tamga of the Kayı tribe from the Oghuz (Xəlilov, 2009, p. 20). Research into the semantics and distribution area of the sign with outward-pointing ends shaped like horns ( ) revealed that this schematic symbol was also used as a tamga. It was known by the names "double-bladed axe" and "baltvar." After the widespread adoption of Islam among Turkic-speaking peoples, this sign came to be interpreted as a "cauldron," and in Central Asia it was called "toskur" (tekne – trough). Similar symbols are found among the clan signs of the Bulgars, Crimean Tatars, and Nogais. This sign also appears among Saka-Scythian symbols (Bronze Age and 1st millennium BCE) in the Kochkor Valley, Tien Shan [Qurbanov, 2013:51-302], and is mentioned in the work *Tavarikh-i Ali Seljuk* (Yazıcıoğlu, 2009, p. 195), where a similar sign is given as the tamga of the Alkaevli clan of the Oghuz. Research showed that the oldest examples of this sign were found in the Trypillia culture (7th–6th millennium BCE) on the surfaces of pottery vessels [Bongard-Levin, Depik, Derevyanko et al., 1986:150]. Similar style

vessels with such ornaments, discovered at Early Bronze Age sites in Nakhchivan, have so far only been found in Eastern Georgia [Kushnareva, Markovin, 1994:19].

Along with clay vessels, various forms of horn-shaped ornaments also appear in carpets from Azerbaijan, Anatolia, Turkmenistan, Karakalpakstan, Dagestan, and Tabasaran. In Karabakh carpets (Malybeyli), this ornament became more widespread. The "goat horn" ornament was used as a stamped mark in Anatolia, the South and North Caucasus, Central Asia, Crimea, along the Volga, and in Eastern Siberia under names such as "qoşqar," "qoçqar," "koçkar," "qoç müyüz" (goat horn), "koçkarok," "kayabaran" (rock-cat/goat), and in Altai as "kulya" (goat horn), among others. Similar examples are found among the Karachays of the North Caucasus in clan distinction and recognition signs "kosxar" (qoçqar, qoşqar), "tülpar," "semen," and among the Kazakhs in clans "nayman," "qarakirey" [Qurbanov, 2013:259, 305, 307], as well as in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions [Gülensoy, 1989:7]. In ancient Turkic mythology, the image of the ram was considered one of the sacred symbols. On one hand, the ram symbolized "abundance" and "fertility," and on the other, it was regarded as a sacred creature that car-

ries the souls of the dead to the abode of God.

The sign resembling a sword ( ) was called “sword” [Qurbanov, 2013:51, 272] and had a protective character. This sign was widely used among Turkic seals that spread from Anatolia to Europe [Yazıcıoğlu, 2009:94]. Similar images are also found among the petroglyphs near Lake Göycha. In the work Şəcəreyi-Tərakimə, this sign is given as the seal of the Imri tribe of the Oghuz [Ebülqazi, 2002:55].

## Conclusion

As a result of studying new archaeological materials, it can be concluded that, like all regions of Azerbaijan, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, an integral part of the country, possesses an ancient history and culture. Their discovery and research allow for new scientific knowledge about the material and spiritual culture of Azerbaijan.

The observation of elements related to ancient Turkic culture, alongside the religious and ideological views of people in the petroglyphs, as well as the presence of analogs of these elements among Turkic seals, testifies that the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has a rich and ancient history and that this region historically was one of the centers of proto-Turkic culture—this is new scientific evidence confirming this position.

The artifacts studied, like any examples of material culture, have scientific significance for the in-depth study of the medieval history and material culture of Nakhchivan. Their creation was connected with the craftsmanship, skills, and habits of the people. Since they were made by different masters and used for different purposes, they were not identical but differed in shape and characteristics. Each pattern motif was drawn intentionally, carrying a specific semantic meaning related to the religious worldview and mentality of the people.

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## МАЗМҰНЫ

### Жаңа және қазіргі замандағы Қазақстан

Дадабаева Г., Мейманбаева Ф. 1930–40 жж. халықты қоныстандырудың бір түрі ретінде жер аудары (Қазақстан мысалында).....	4
Әбубекір М.Н. ХХ ғ. басындағы Шығыс Қазақстандағы Алаш қозғалысының құрылымдық-институционалдық қызметі: тарихи талдау .....	14
Қ.А. Искаков Қожа Ахмет Ясауи кесенесінің пантеондық қызметі.....	23

### Археология

Халилов Т. Жаңа археологиялық табыстар, Әзіrbайжанның орта ғасырлар тарихына қатысты .....	30
---	----

### Этнология

Габдулина А.Ж., Алиакбарова А. П., Әділбаева А.С., Оспанова А.К. Орталық Азиядағы су ресурстары: өзекті мәселелер, даму стратегиясы және Қазақстан тәжірибесі .....	42
Тагиева Г. Р. Мұхаммед Ҳұсейн Шахдиярдың поэзиясындағы этнографиялық кеңістікте дәстүрлі тағамдар мен сүсындардың бейнеленуі.....	50

### Ортағасырлық Қазақстан

Кайратова А.К. Алтын Орда дәуірінде әдебиеттің қалыптасуы мен дамуы.....	56
---	----

---

## CONTENTS

### New and modern Kazakhsan

G. Dadabayeva, F. Meimanbayeva	
Deportation as a form of population resettlement in the 1930-40S (the Case of Kazakhstan).....	4
M.N. Abubakir	
The structural and institutional activities of the Alash movement in East Kazakhstan in the early 20th century: a historicaal analysis .....	14
K. Iskakov	
Pantheon role of the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi.....	23

### Archaeology

T. Khalilov	
New archaeological discoveries related to the history of Azerbaijan in the medieval period .....	30

### Ethnology

A.Zh. Gabdulina, A.P. Aliakbarova, A.S. Adilbayeva, A.K. Ospanova	
Water resources of Central Asia: challenges and development strategy, Kazakhstan's experience .....	42
G.R. Taghiyeva	
Representations of traditional food and beverage in the ethnographic landscape of Muhammad Huseyn Shahriyar's poetry.....	50

### Medieval Kazakhstan

A.K. Kairatova	
The formation and development of literature in the golden Horde Period.....	56