

Burial practices in Karnut during the Early Bronze Age.

an abstract by Levon Aghikyan

In the territory of Armenia, the earliest intentional burials can be attributed to the Late Neolithic period. Based on current data, these were positioned within the settlement. The first complete burials from the Neolithic period were excavated in two archaeological sites, those of Aknashen and Masis Blur. In the subsequent period, during the Chalcolithic, we see the appearance of burials outside of the habitation areas. The first tombs, or *kurgans*, in Armenia, were excavated in Aknalich and dates to 4340 - 4050 BC. From the early Bronze Age, 3500 – 2500 BC, we see the first manifestations of more common burial rituals.

In light of studies made on the early burial practices in Armenia, the current author has focused his research on newly acquired data from burial rituals within the Kura-Araxes culture. This approach also involves a treatise on the settlement-cemetery interrelations based on the Bronze Age sites of Armenia. Until recently only the following types of relationships between settlement and cemetery have been identified:

- Cemeteries without settlements
- Cemeteries next to settlements (Extramural)
- Individual burials inside of settlements (Intramural)

The present study of an Early Bronze Age site (Kura-Araxes) is located in the village of Karnut on the eastern edge of the Shirak plain. Recent excavations at Karnut have presented an interesting and new type of relationship between the settlement and the cemetery. Excavations of the actual settlement were conducted by Dr. Ruben Badalyan in 1980s, where a single-layer settlement was unearthed from the Early Bronze Age. However, recent construction activities in this area have now exposed burials in the site and since the discovery, half a dozen Early Bronze Age tombs have been excavated between the years 2015-2018. These burials show several variations in their burial forms and the following types have been identified:

- Two types of tomb/chamber structures
- Individual and group burials
- Early and late periods burials in the same chamber

The burials of Karnut are unique in that among these we have identified two new burial practices that previously haven't been documented in the territory of Armenia: 1) a new interrelation between settlement and cemetery, and 2) new aspects of funerary rituals such as burials in front of the chamber entrance. These exiting findings needs further inquiry in order to comprehend if the interrelation between the housing and the burials are related to the reuse of sacred space or an actual abandonment of the settlement. Furthermore, are the skeletal remains placed outside the tombs a result of sacrificial elements or a reuse of older structures?

