# A CONSIDERATION OF STATUS AND WEALTH IN THE LAKE VAN BASIN ACCORDING TO THE EARLY IRON AGE BURIALS

## ERKEN DEMİR ÇAĞ MEZARLARI IŞIĞINDA VAN GÖLÜ HAVZASI'NDA STATÜ VE VARSILLIK ÜZERİNE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erken Demir Çağ, Gömü Gelenekleri, Van Gölü Havzası

### ABSTRACT

*Archaeological data and written sources signify some social and political changes in the East Anatolia during the Early Iron Age. The appearance of the fortresses and the conflicts between the tribes are the testimony of rising the status and wealth in the Early Iron Age population. However, their reflection to the burials is not very clear though none of the burials have attributed to a ruler or a special person yet. That means, the evidence from the Early Iron Age burials alone, do not enough for the indicator of status and wealth. But, if the burials are interpreted from the overhead, together with other archaeological information, the existence of the iron and bronze objects in the burials can be interpreted as a reflection of the status and wealth in the East Anatolia.*

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## ÖZET

*Arkeolojik veriler ve yazılı kaynaklar, Erken Demir Çağ'da Doğu Anadolu'nun sosyo-politik yapısında bazı değişimlerin yaşandığına işaret eder. Kalelerin ortaya çıkışı ve aşiretler arası çekişmeler, Erken Demir Çağ nüfusunda statü ve zenginliğin ortaya çıkmaya başladığını kanıtlar. Ancak bu değişimin mezarlardaki yansıması, şimdiye kadar herhangi bir yönetici veya özel kişiye ait bir mezar bulunmadığı için çok net değildir. Dolayısıyla, Erken Demir Çağ mezarlarından elde edilen veriler, statü ve zenginlik göstergesi açısından tek başına yeterli değildir. Ancak bu veriler, diğerleriyle bir bütün olarak ele alınırsa, mezarlar içindeki demir ve bronz objeler statü ve varsıllığın bir yansıması olarak kabul edilebilir.*

Eastern Anatolian highlands[1] was hosted a series of ethnic peoples by the end of the second millennium BC. However, we do not have any tangible archaeological evidence, related to the social and political status of these peoples. As it is well known, the first hierarchic societies emerged in Transcaucasia, at the northeastern frontiers of Eastern Anatolian highlands, during the Middle Bronze Age. The existence of k*urgans* and their rich burial gifts directly proves the social and political formation in the Transcaucasian lands. These are the first signs of social status and wealth for the Middle Bronze Age societies[2]. Although Eastern Anatolian highlands is a junction region to the Transcaucasian lands, only a limited number of *kurgans* investigated in the Northeastern Anatolia[3]. When Anatolian *kurgans* were taken into consideration, they are differs from Transcaucasian examples with their smaller size and poor burial contents, contrary to the rich Transcaucasian burials. In any case, the existence of *kurgans* itself, implies the initiation of a social and political formations in the Northeast Anatolia during the Middle Bronze Age, but it is not developed to the high level wealth as seen in Transcaucasia. However, by the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, another initiation about social and political developments were appeared around Lake Van Basin where a state formation were achieved[4]. In other words, although the first traces of hierarchical societies appeared in the Northeast Anatolia under the Transcaucasian influence in the Middle Bronze Age, state formation and complex societies with status and wealth entirely developed in the Lake Van Basin in the Early and Middle Iron Ages.

Archaeological evidence from Eastern Anatolian highlands point outs some social and political changes around Lake Van Basin during the Early Iron Age. Although archaeological data is scarce and do not present the whole picture, Assyrian written documents informs the activities of peoples around Lake Van Basin. These documents mentioned about *Uruadri* and *Nairi* Land peoples, ruling by chiefdoms, and their strong fortresses on the top of the hills[5]. Beside of Assyrian written documents, fortresses on the hills -discovered with the archaeological surveys- imply some radical changes on social and political situation of Eastern Turkey. What about the cemeteries of these peoples tells us about these changes? The archaeological information from the cemeteries of Karagündüz, Dilkaya, Ernis, Yoncatepe and Çatak, which is recently found, will be discussed here from

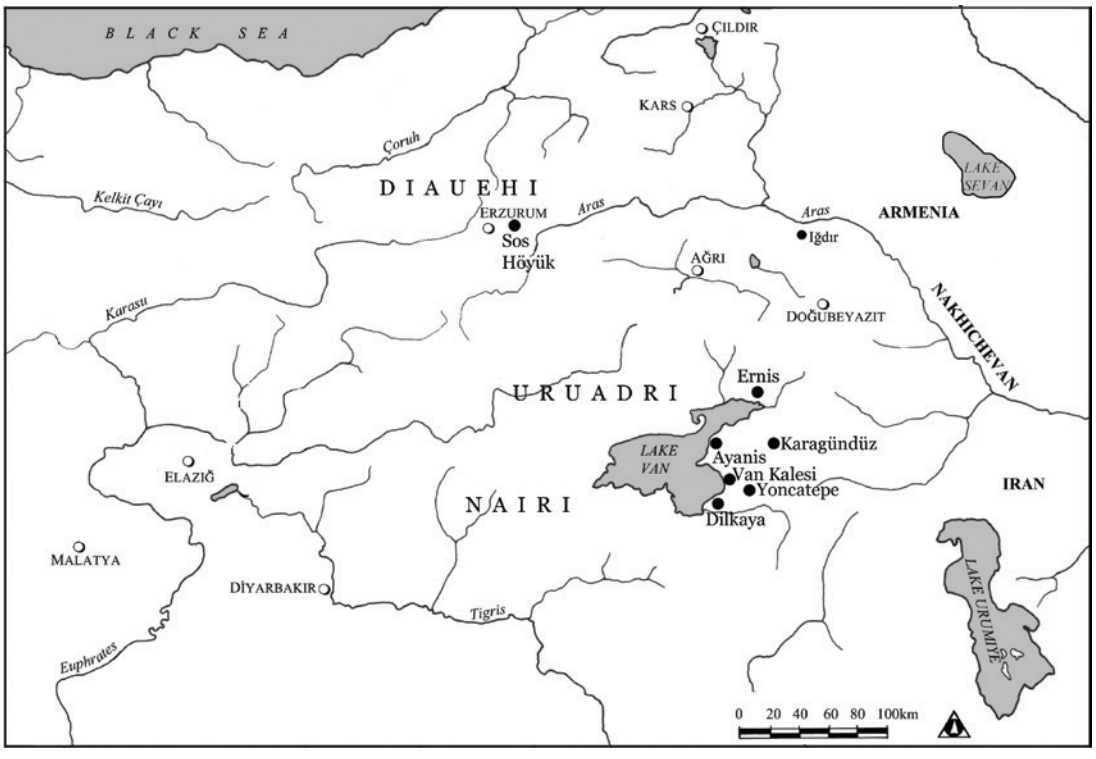



Figure 1: Early Iron Age Cemeteries in the Lake Van Basin / *Van Gölü Havzası Erken Demir Çağ Mezarları*

[1] The term of "Eastern Anatolian highlands" in this paper refers to the regions of Northeast Anatolia and Lake Van Basin.

[2] Kushnareva 1997: 230-233, Puturidze 2003: 126; Rubinson 2003: 130.

[3] Özfırat 2003: 344, Özfırat 2009: 635, Özfırat 2014a: 26-28.

[4] For detailed discussions about social and political developments in Eastern Anatolia, see Erdem (in press).

[5] Çilingiroğlu 1994: 1-9.

the point of status and wealth[6] (Fig. 1). However, I should notice that there are long-term discussions about dating, chronology and contexts of some of the burials due to same cemeteries and even same tombs were used during both in the Early and Middle Iron Ages[7]. As it is well known, the appearance of the grooved pottery tradition accepted as the main archaeological criteria for dating of the Early Iron Age in the region. And their existence in the burials in Lake Van Basin were used as one of the main archaeological support data for the dating of the burials to the Early Iron Age. However recent investigations about continuation of grooved pottery into the Middle Iron Age -Urartian State period- and some other archaeological data related with Urartian culture in the Lake Van Basin caused to the burial's dating reconsidered[8]. In this paper, I will focus on the contents of the Early Iron cemeteries for understanding of status and wealth rather than their dating problems.

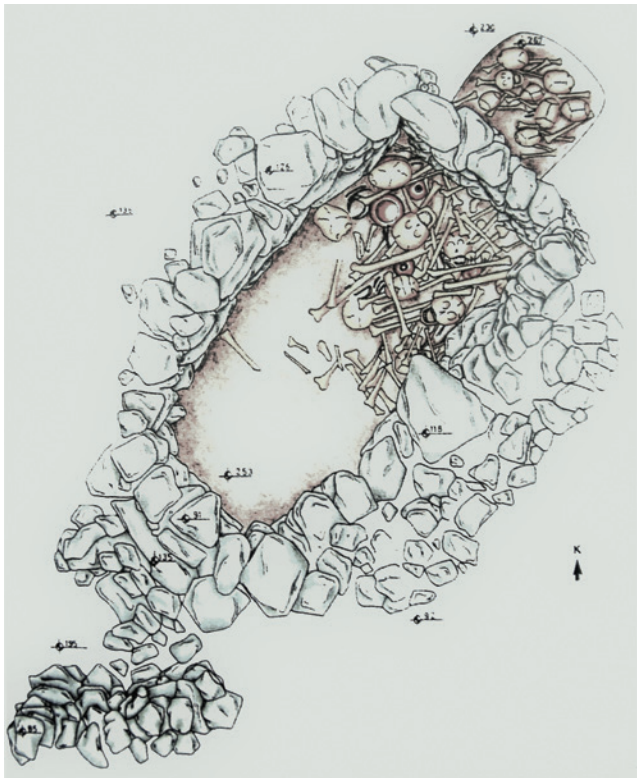


Figure 2: K10 Burial from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b: 14) / K*aragündüz K10 Mezarı*

Early Iron Age cemeteries in the Eastern Anatolia mostly known from Lake Van Basin. There are several tomb types in the Early Iron Age East Anatolia. The most common types Underground Chamber Tombs and Stone Cist Tombs. Stone Cists are in a rectangular plan and measuring roughly 5 and 2 meters. This type tombs is known from Ernis and Hakkari, in the southeast corner of East Anatolia[9]. It also known from the burials at Hasanlu V and Geoy Tepe K in the Northwest Iran[10]. The other burial type, which is the most common seen, is Underground Chamber Tombs (Fig. 2). These tombs usually consist of stone-built walls within pits dug into the ground, which is usually in rectangular plan. The length of these rooms reaches up to 6 meters in some examples. Their widths vary between 1.5 and 2 meters and heights between 1.5 and 2.5 meters. Since some of the chambers planned for the multiple burials, a dromos built with stone or a shaft dug directly into the ground connects to the surface. There are also tombs without a dromos, which probably entered by removing one of the flat stones on the top cover[11].

The main character of the Early Iron Age burials is to be multiple burials. Burial number varies by the size of the burial chambers and duration of use. For example, the number of burials in Karagündüz is changes between 20 and 106[12]. That means, the graves used for long periods, multiple times, and the previous remains pushed back for the new burials[13] (Fig. 2). On the other hand, some special treatments also identified at Yoncatepe and Karagündüz. In the Tomb 3 at Yoncatepe, skulls of the previous deceased protected in niches or bowls. Similarly, in the tomb 10 at Karagündüz, skulls placed in a pit opened at the far end of the burial chamber. Related with this practice, a sort of "cult of ancestors" has been proposed by M. B. Baştürk, who recently worked on belief systems and rituals of the Early Iron Age people[14].

When the burial findings considered, many iron and bronze object found in these Early Iron Age burials. In addition to pottery[15], some personal objects such as jewellery, ornaments and ceremonial weapons made of iron and bronze were also found[16]. Bracelets, rings,

[6] Sevin/Kavaklı 1996a: 1-20; Sevin 2004a: 358-373; Sevin 2004b: 180-187; Sevin 2014: 355-360; Çilingiroğlu 1991: 29-38; Çilingiroğlu 1993: 469-491; Kuvanç vd. 2016: 149-194.

[7] Fort long term usage of the cemeteries both in the Early and Middle Iron Ages see; Çilingiroğlu 1991: 30; Çilingiroğlu 1993: 478; Sevin 1996a: 441-443; Köroğlu/Konyar 2008: 123-146.

[8] Sevin2004a: 380, Köroğlu/Konyar 2008: 123-146, Erdem 2009: 299-308; Özfırat 2018.

[9] Sevin 2003: 187-188; Sevin 2005: 98-104.

[10] Burton/Brown 1951: 142; Rubinson 1991: 373-394.

[11] Konyar 2011: 218-219.

[12] Sevin/Kavaklı 1996c: 23; Sevin 1999: 161; Sevin 2003: 187.

[13] Sevin 1999: 161.

[14] Baştürk 2015: 7. Cult of ancestors is also known from Hakkari burials and stelas (Sevin 2005: 102-103).

[15] I will not discuss pottery findings here since the pottery in the burials do not bear any specific feature related with status and wealth.

[16] Similar ceremonial objects found in Hasanlu IV, Kordlar Tepe

daggers, knives, clothing pins and necklaces made of various stone beads are the main objects of the Early Iron Age burial contents[17] (Fig. 3a-b, 4a-b, 5a-b). According to the findings, the objects from the graves do not imply a certain difference within the statuses of the deceased. For example, at Karagündüz, nearly



Figure 3a: Iron Bracelets from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan Demir Bilezikler*



Figure 3b: Bronze Bracelet from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan Bronz Bilezik*



Figure 4a: Needles, Rings and Beads from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan İğneler, Yüzükler ve Boncuklar*



Figure 4b: Beads from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan Boncuklar*

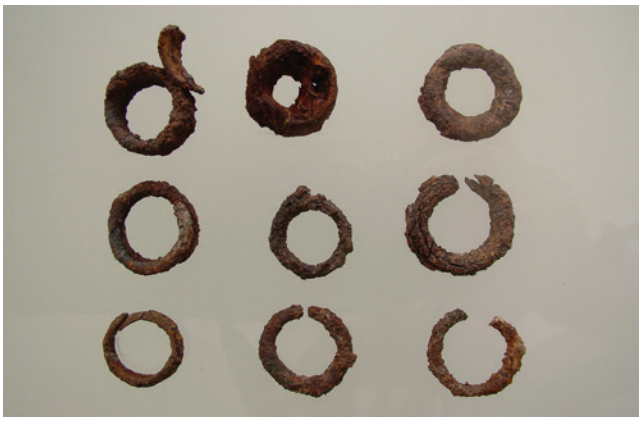


Figure 5a: Rings from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan Yüzükler*



Figure 5b: Weapons from Karagündüz (Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b: 34-35) / *Karagündüz Mezarlığı'ndan Silahlar*

IIA and Dinkha Tepe II in the Northwest Iran (Sevin 1999: 162).

[17] Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b: 1-20; Sevin/Kavaklı 1996c: 9-45; Sevin 2004: 358-373; Çilingiroğlu 1991: 29-38; Çilingiroğlu 1993: 469-491; Kuvanç/Ayaz/Işık/Erdoğan/Genç 2016: 160.

every deceased was wearing necklace, probably more than one. Since the needles and the buttons are related to the dresses, it is hard to associate them with a specific gender. Only two groups of finding can be refers to a specific gender. The first of these is the spindle whorls discovered at Karagündüz and Yoncatepe, accompanying the female bodies. The second group, related with male, is the weapons such as mace heads, iron spearheads, shaft-hole axes and daggers, which are mostly found at Ernis-Evditepe, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe[18] (Fig. 5b). Similar weapons were also found in the Hakkari burials, as well[19]. Based on these finds, none of the Early Iron Age burials in the Lake Van Basin can be characterised as the burial of a king, a ruler or even a warrior[20]. However, the existence of the personal objects and weapons within the burials can refer a kind of initial phase of the social status and wealth for the Early Iron population[21].

As conclusion, archaeological evidence from the burials of Karagündüz, Dilkaya, Ernis, Yoncatepe and Çatak provides some information about the burial customs of the Early Iron Age people in the Lake Van Basin. The burials mostly contains iron and bronze adornments and jewelry, and only some of the burials like Ernis, Karagündüz and Yoncatepe includes weapons. However, none of the finds from the burials can be signify as the burial of a ruler or a special person. Although it is certain that social and political changes started during the Early Iron Age from the written documents and also fortresses found in the archaeological surveys, the finds from the burials alone are not enough for the expressing of a social and political changes. In other words, the reflection of the status and wealth in the Early Iron Age burials is not clearly observes from the finds in the burials. In any case, the appearance of the weapons in the burials for the first time and other metal objects can be interpret as the initial indicator of status and wealth in the region during the Early Iron Age. These initial attempts about social and political developments in the Early Iron Age provide a basis for the establishment of the Urartian State in the Middle Bronze Age.

[18] Baştürk 2015: 6.

[19] Hakkari burials contains gold, silver and bronze objects together with cult vessels. These objects described as status objects by Sevin and the burials attributed to the rulers of the local people (Sevin 2005: 101-103; Sevin 2015: 79-91). However, the burials in the Lake Van Basin is not similar to those of burials in Hakkari in terms of rich burial context.

[20] Baştürk 2015: 6. On the other hand, Hakkari burials described as warrior burials by V. Sevin, in the light of burial context and stelas around the burials (Sevin 2005: 102-103).

[21] Sevin/Kavaklı 1996b: 1-20; Köroğlu 2003: 231-244; Köroğlu/ Konyar 2005: 25-38; Erdem 2011: 59-68; Özfırat 2014b: 54-55.

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