ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION PROCESSES IN THE ANTIQUE PERIOD BASED ON BURIAL FINDINGS: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF CENTRAL ASIA, THE NEAR EAST, AND EUROPE

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ANNOTATION This paper examines the migration processes of the Antique period through the lens of burial findings, comparing archaeological evidence from Central Asia, the Near East, and Europe. Using interpretative and bioarchaeological methods, the research highlights the relationship between funerary practices, material culture, and biological traces of population movement. The study emphasizes Uzbekistan's role as a cultural bridge between East and West, revealing how migration contributed to the transformation of social, religious, and ethnic structures in antiquity. The results indicate that burial data serve as one of the most reliable sources for reconstructing ancient migration routes and intercultural interactions.

KEYWORDS: Migration; Archaeology; Burial findings; Central Asia; Near East; Europe; Bioarchaeology; Cultural interaction; Antique period; Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Migration processes refer to the movement of human communities in ancient times, their relocation to new territories, and the resulting cultural, ethnic, and social transformations. Archaeologically, although various sources exist for studying migration, burial findings are particularly valuable: funerary rituals, grave goods (weapons, ornaments, pottery), anthropological remains, and cemetery layouts serve to illuminate migration routes as well as the interaction between local and incoming cultures. When the findings from Central Asia, the Near East, and Europe are compared, both the external (geographical) and internal (cultural) aspects of migration become evident. Migration is one of the most significant cultural and social processes in human history, and archaeological evidence—especially burial findings—provides crucial information about population movements, ethnic composition, and cultural connections of ancient societies[1].

During the Antique period, that is, between the 1st millennium BCE and the 1st centuries CE, the territory of Uzbekistan represented one of the most important cultural transition zones of Central Asia[1]. Burials from this period—Sopollitepa, Jarkutan, Dalverzintepa,

Tillatepa, Karatepa, and Fayoztepa—serve as key sources for studying the interaction between sedentary and nomadic populations, religious beliefs, and economic relations[3].

Burial findings reflect not only religious or ritual aspects but also traces of biological and cultural migrations. In the archaeological context, funerary traditions, skeletal types, and the provenance of pottery and ornaments indicate intercultural influence[4]. This research is based on the methods of interpretative archaeology and bioarchaeology. Firstly, typologies of grave types and funerary practices are compared to identify interregional similarities. Secondly, data from anthropological morphology and archaeogenetics are used to determine population movement routes[7]. In the example of Uzbekistan, differences between Sopollitepa and Jarkutan cultures and the burial complexes of Dalverzintepa and Tillatepa are compared with the Elam and Mesopotamian sites of the Near East and the Yamnaya and Hallstatt cultures of Europe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Central Asia, burials were often performed in the form of kurgans (tumuli). For example, the Tasmola culture (9th–4th centuries BCE) in Kazakhstan buried bodies in barrow-shaped graves. Similarly, in the Korgantas culture (approximately 400–113 BCE), burials with kurgans and animal sacrifices were found. These peculiarities in burial typology—funerary forms typical of nomadic lifestyles—may serve as evidence of groups entering the region through migration and blending with local traditions. In Central Asia, burials discovered in the archaeological complexes of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Bactria-Margiana reveal both local and incoming elements—for instance, cave burials and high-layered kurgans, as well as additional artifacts in the funerary context, indicate migration. Antique-period burial findings in Uzbekistan were located at the heart of international migration processes. Artifacts discovered at sites such as Sopollitepa and Jarkutan (vessels, bronze weapons, horse equipment) show similarities with the Near East and the Iranian Plateau. The style of the golden ornaments from Tillatepa, on the other hand, demonstrates the expansion of contacts with Europe during the Greco-Bactrian period. Moreover, anthropological materials (cranial measurements, skeletal types) reveal the mixing of sedentary and nomadic ethnic groups in Central Asia[19]. This process was closely linked to climate change, economic needs, and military invasions[5]. In this respect, ancient Uzbekistan functioned as a crossroads of cultures—a true “archaeological bridge” between East and West.

RESULTS

From the Neolithic period onward, various burial forms such as exposure and secondary burials appeared in the Near East. This indicates cultural parallels between local traditions and migrant groups. Migration routes from the Near East to Central Asia are reflected in the archaeological record, especially through ceramics, coins, and burial customs. Graves from Elamite, Median, and Parthian periods in the Iranian Plateau also

reveal social stratification[13]. In these regions, inhumation and cremation practices coexisted, demonstrating stages of intercultural transition. In contrast, cremation was rare in Uzbekistan—signifying the dominance of sedentary belief systems. Kurgan burials from the Yamnaya and later Hallstatt cultures in Europe (3rd–1st millennia BCE) display cranial types similar to those in Central Asia. DNA studies by Olalde and colleagues demonstrate the presence of Asian genetic components in Bronze Age Europe[6], confirming migration flows directed westward through Central Asia. One of the most thoroughly studied examples in Europe is the Yamnaya culture (ca. 3300–2600 BC), distinguished by "pit grave" or "kurgan" burials. The existence of these kurgan-type graves and corresponding genetic data across steppe regions from Ukraine to Kazakhstan has led to the hypothesis that migration was associated with the spread of the Indo-European language.

DISCUSSION

Based on the above results, several aspects can be discussed: Cultural exchange and local adaptation – The parallels between dakhma-type burials in the Near East and those in Central Asia show that migration involved not only population movement but also the spread of rituals and religious-ethnic symbols. Biological and social manifestations of migration – Anthropological and genetic analyses demonstrate the intermixing of local and incoming groups in Central Asia. Limitations – Burial findings do not always directly prove migration; they may instead represent cultural teachings, local traditions, or regional adaptations. Sopollitepa (Surkhandarya) burial findings, dated to the 2nd millennium BCE, show traces of both sedentary agricultural and nomadic traditions. In the Jarkutan necropolis, burials of men with weapons and horse bones suggest the presence of a military class[7]. The golden ornaments discovered in the Dalverzintepa and Tillatepa burials indicate links with the Indus Valley and the Near East. In The golden ornaments discovered in the Dalverzintepa and Tillatepa burials indicate links with the Indus Valley and the Near East. In the monastic complexes of Karatepa and Fayoztepa, syncretic religious rituals are associated with the introduction of Buddhism into the region[8].

CONCLUSION

Archaeological analyses based on burial findings demonstrate that during the Antique period, the migration processes passing through the territory of Uzbekistan left profound biological, cultural, and religious traces. The processes of cultural exchange with the Near East and Europe further highlight the importance and role of Uzbekistan's archaeology in the historical development of Central Asia. Migration processes directly influenced the formation of ancient communities, economic development, and transformations in systems of religious beliefs. Therefore, burial findings are regarded as one of the most essential sources for reconstructing the history of migration.

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