

Human remains from Qieh-Boynou Kurgan, Iran, 2020

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The Qieh-Boynou Kurgan is located north of the Ahmadbeiglou village ($38^{\circ}25'49''$ N, $47^{\circ}33'16''$ E), in the Central District of Meshginshahr County, Ardabil Province, Iran (Figure 1), approximately 10km west of Meshginshahr city in a direct line. This site is situated on the western terrace of the Meshgin Chay River and lies within the area of the Ahmadbeiglou Dam (Figure 2 and 3). Initially, a survey of the dam area was conducted by Heidarian in 2008, which led to the identification of 12 sites ranging from the Middle Paleolithic to the Islamic period (Heidarian 2017). Among these was Ahmadbeiglou 10 site, or Qieh-Boynou Kurgan, which was excavated in the fall of 2020 by Morteza Khanipour.

Two trenches measuring 10×10 m and 9×10 m were opened in the eastern part of the site, along with a test trench 12×1.5 m and three other test trenches 1.5×3 m in other parts of the site. No artifacts were found in these test trenches. Archaeological findings from the two main trenches included pottery, a bronze pin, and both animal and human bones (Khanipour & Akbari 2024). In the northeastern part of Trench 1, the excavation revealed the remains of a grave structure, indicating the presence of a stone grave that had been looted by treasure hunters. During the excavation of this grave, scattered human bones and pottery were discovered. Additionally, three simple pit graves were identified in this trench, labeled as Graves 2 to 4. The main grave was constructed by digging a pit about 120cm deep, then building walls around it with large slabs of stone (Figure 4), with the space behind the northern and southern walls filled with smaller stones. The roof was also covered with large stone slabs, and then the burial was placed inside. Since this grave was completely looted, only scattered human bones, teeth, and pottery sherds were recovered. The architecture of the three other graves differed significantly from that of Grave 1. In these graves, a pit was dug and placed on some stone slabs. Graves 2 and 3 were found relatively intact, though the legs in Grave 4 had been partially destroyed by treasure hunters. No artifacts were

found within these three graves, and only some pottery sherds were recovered from the surrounding deposits.

The recovered pottery can be classified into three types based on the color of the fabric: red, gray, and gray-black, with the red type being much less common. Most of the pottery is plain, with only occasional decorations such as incised, applied,

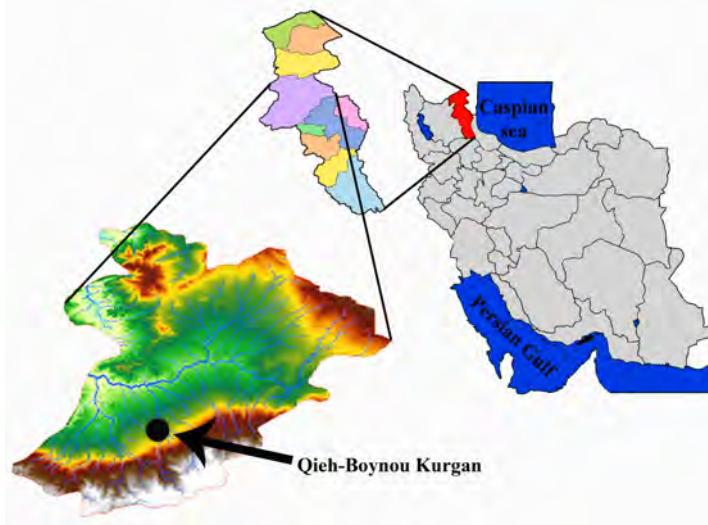


Figure 1. Location of Qieh-Boynou Kurgan, drawing by Morteza Khanipour.



Figure 2. Ahmadbeiglou Dam and location of Qieh-Boynou Kurgan (ABL 10) (source: Google Earth, edited by Morteza Khanipour).

burnished, or polished on the surfaces. Overall, these vessels are similar to those found at Boyni Yoghun (Pourfaraj 2012:78, Plate 1), Shahryeri (Ebtehaj 2004:256), and Khoram Abad (Rezaloo & Ayremloo 2017). The Grave 1 structures at Qieh-Boynou are also comparable to structures found at Shahryeri (Ebtehaj 2004:148-169), Boyni Yoghun (Pourfaraj 2012:71, Figure 1), and Zard Khaneh Ahar (Kazempour 2014:291, Figure 8) in Iran, as well as some sites in Nakhchivan (Belli & Bahşaliyev 2001) and Armenia (Smith et al. 2003). Based on the ceramics and architectural



Figure 3. Overview of Qieh-Boynou, photograph by Morteza Khanipour.



Figure 4. Stone structure of Grave 1, photograph by Morteza Khanipour.

features, Qieh-Boynou can be dated to the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I. The kurgan burials were widespread from the Late Chalcolithic to the Iron Age across vast areas of Eurasia (Rubinson 1977), and archaeological research in Iran indicates that this burial tradition was practiced in limited regions of northwest Iran during the 2nd millennium BCE (Ebtehaj 2004; Pourfaraj 2012; Kazempour 2014; Rezaloo & Ayremloo 2017; Khanipour & Akbari 2024).

The investigation of graves and the analysis of human skeletal remains offer essential insights into the biological characteristics and mortuary practices of past populations (Khanipour 2025). Assessing burial patterns (Sarhaddi-Dadian 2017; Naseri et al. 2019; 2020; Khanipour & Molaie Kordshooli 2023; Lohari et al. 2024), demographic composition (Najafi et al. 2018), and health indicators provides a basis for reconstructing the social and cultural aspects of these communities (Sołtysiak et al. 2029; Fabbri & Vincenti 2021; Jamshidi Yeganeh 2023). Within this framework, determining sex, age-at-death, and pathological conditions is fundamental for establishing the biological profile of individuals. In this research, the sex of the individuals was assessed using standard methods (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994). Age-at-death was estimated based on the closure of cranial sutures when the skull was preserved (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994:36), and in burials lacking a cranium, long bone measurements were used to approximate age (Table 1).

Table 1. Basic characteristics of human remains from Qieh-Boynou.

Grave No.	Comp. ¹	Sex ²	Age-at-death	PC ³	Preservation
1	1		adult		fragments of bones and teeth
2	2	F**	elderly	0	bones affected by erosion
3	2		young child	0	well preserved skeleton
4	2	F**	adolescent	0	well preserved skeleton
5	1		adult		destroyed by treasure hunters
6	1		adult		destroyed by treasure hunters

¹ Completeness: 1 – fragments only, 2 – slightly damaged

² Sex: F** – more likely female than male

³ Plagiocephaly: 0 – none

The skeleton from Grave 2 was oriented west-east, with the head towards east, placed on its left side facing south. The bones were heavily eroded, with many small bones such as those from the feet and ribs missing, leaving only the skull, hand, and femur, though even these remaining bones were highly eroded (Figure 5). Based on the skull and other bones, this burial appears to belong to an elderly female. The skeleton from Grave 3 was also oriented west-east, with the head towards west, and the body placed on its right-side facing south. It was a young child. Orientation of the skeleton from Grave 4 was the same. Due to illegal digging around this burial, part



Figure 5. Overview of Grave 2, photograph by Morteza Khanipour



Figure 6. Skull from Grave 4, photograph by Morteza Khanipour.

of the grave structure and a portion of the leg were destroyed, but the skull (Figure 6), ribs, part of the hand, and femur were preserved. The skeleton belonged to an adolescent female.

Two human burials (Graves 5 and 6) were found in Trench 2. Large portions of Grave 5 were destroyed by looting activities, and the skeleton was scattered among the soil, with only parts of the femur remaining at the burial. Based on the existing remains it seems that this burial, like the others, had an east-west orientation. A bronze pin was also found nearby, which may have belonged to this burial. Significant portions of Grave 6 were also destroyed. During the excavation, parts of the hand bone and femur were recovered. Based on the remaining evidence, it is possible that this burial had a north-south orientation, with the head positioned in the south and the body placed on its right side.

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