

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTLEMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIL-MUGHAN ECONOMIC REGION

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Abstract

The article analyzes the historical settlement of the Mil-Mughan economic region, tracing its development stages from antiquity to the modern period, and explores the area's historical and archaeological monuments. An analysis of the historical-geographical features of the Mil-Mughan plain highlights that a significant part of the territory was traditionally used as winter pastures.

The study reveals that most permanent settlements were concentrated along the banks of the Kura and Araz rivers, while the establishment of new settlements in the early and mid-20th century was largely associated with the construction of new irrigation canals. The article also investigates demographic changes and migration processes from the 19th century up to the 1970s, as well as the founding of Russian villages in the winter pastures of the Shahsevan - considered the local population - resulting from Tsarist policies implemented in the Mughan region.

1. Introduction

The study of historical settlement patterns across the economic regions of our country plays a crucial role in understanding the past of our people. In ancient times, the geographical environment had a significant influence on human society and its settlement. In Azerbaijan, the Mil-Mughan plain – with its favorable natural conditions, rich resources, diverse vegetation, abundant rivers, and freshwater lakes – served as a cradle for the earliest human settlements.

This territory became one of the earliest centers of agriculture and animal husbandry. Archaeological excavations have uncovered elongated river stones fashioned into various tools for tilling the soil, the earliest plows, as well as grinding and rubbing implements, demonstrating that the inhabitants of this area had been cultivating and using cereal crops since ancient times. Historical evidence confirms that the carriers of this culture were pastoral and agricultural tribes whose homeland coincided with the regions where the ancestors of domestic animals lived and where wild species of wheat and barley grew.

The proximity of this territory to the Caspian Sea contributed not only to the development of farming, herding, and household activities but

also to traditional occupations such as fishing and hunting. The geographical location of the Mughan plain positioned it as a crossroads linking southern and northern Azerbaijan and, at the same time, as a connector at the intersection of ancient cultures. Examining the evolution of this development and the formation of settlements up to the modern period represents one of the key directions in the study of population geography.

In the investigation of historical settlement in Azerbaijan, the contributions of historians such as Q. Qeybullayev [9], K. Shukurov [2], V. Piriyeu [12], T. Najafli [11], F. Agasioglu [3], and others have been of great importance. Likewise, archaeologists including K. Mammadov [10], T. Aliyev [6], F. Babayev [5], M. Rahimova [13], among others, as well as geographers such as Z. Eminov [4], E. Badalov [4], and others, have played a significant role in advancing research on this subject.

The analysis of the topic employs a combination of methods, including historical-geographical, systemic analysis, comparative, statistical, and other approaches.

2. Analysis and discussion

Mil-Mughan, located in the central part of Northern Azerbaijan, is a political-historical ter-

ritory and one of the earliest cultural centers of human settlement. Owing to its favorable geographical position, rich natural resources such as pastures and arable lands, agro-climatic conditions, and flat relief, it became a cradle where human society first emerged and developed. This area, situated at the confluence of the Kura and Araz rivers, was especially fertile in ancient times, making it an attractive site for early settlement.

The Mil-Mughan plain encompassed the central part of the Aran region. The word Aran is believed to mean “warm lowland” or “winter pasture.” In the early Middle Ages, this name was applied to the whole of Northern Azerbaijan, referred to in sources as Arran, al-Ran, or Aran. It is assumed that the term Aran may also be linked to the name of a tribe - possibly the Aran tribe - that lived within the confederation of Scythian-Massagetae tribes in Northern Azerbaijan during the 2nd–1st millennia BCE. The use of this name spread widely across the vast Turkic world.

Archaeological research in the Mil-Mughan territory has revealed that Mesolithic and Neolithic settlements existed here, and that the density of early agricultural settlements identified in the Mil-Karabakh plain, particularly north of the Gargarchay River, has no parallel in the Caucasus. During the Eneolithic period, more than 150 settlements were studied in the South Caucasus, the majority of which were located south of the Kura River - in the Mil-Karabakh and Mughan regions - mainly along small rivers (such as Misharchay and Injachay) and freshwater lakes.

The largest settlement, Alikomektepe (Mughan), is notable for its rectangular architectural structures, similar to those found around Lake Urmia, whereas in the Kura valley, circular-plan architecture prevailed [1].

In the Mil-Karabakh region, excavations at the Qalatapa monument uncovered the ruins of one of the Albanian cities [5]. This city was founded in the 3rd century BCE, and during the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE it experienced urban development, including craftsmanship, trade, and construction. Following the Mongol invasions, however, the city was reduced to ruins. Qalatapa is located near the village of Salmanbəyli in the Aghjabadi district, at the confluence of the Gargarchay and Gavurark rivers. This territory once belonged to the province of Uti.

According to Strabo, in this province there were the cities of Aynian (Enian) and Anariaka [6]. Aynian was a walled city, known for its crafts

and copper-smithing. In Anariaka, there was a temple associated with divination. These cities are believed to have existed in the 4th–3rd centuries BCE. It is assumed that the city of Enian was founded by the Albanian tribe of Khan or Khan-Khan. K. V. Trever noted that Enian, once called Khan-Khan, initially belonged to the province of Uti and later to Paytarakan (Fig. 1) [7].

The historical stages of settlement in the Aran territory can be briefly characterized as follows. In the earliest stage (9th–4th/5th millennia BCE), that is, during the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Eneolithic periods, the densest settlements in the Caucasus were concentrated in the Mil-Karabakh plains - particularly between and along the banks of the Gargarchay, Khachinchay, Kondalanchay, and Kuruchay rivers.

The subsequent stage (from the mid-5th millennium BCE to the 8th century BCE) corresponds to the Bronze and Iron Ages. During the Bronze Age, the so-called “Kura-Araz culture” emerged, initially marked by the “Stone Box Graves” phase, and by the late 3rd millennium BCE the rise of class-based society was evident. In the period of the “Wooden Grave-Kurgan culture,” the Mil-Karabakh plains again exhibited dense settlement, whereas the Mughan and Shirvan plains showed weaker habitation, and settlement along the Caspian coast was temporary [4].

In this region, during the 3rd–2nd millennia BCE, tribes such as the Qamar-Saka, Gargars, Qashqars, and Caspians inhabited the land, while in the 1st millennium BCE, the area was settled by the Uti, Albanians, Aran, Sadak, Samak, Sharvan, Gugars, Shirak, and Ganja tribes—many of them associated with the Saka confederation.

In the early medieval stage (from the 7th century BCE to the 7th century CE), the left bank of the Kura River belonged to the Massagetae state, while the Mil-Mughan plains were part of the territories of Manna and Media. In the 4th century BCE, the Albanians—one of the largest tribes of the Massagetae—established a state whose territory encompassed the whole of Northern Azerbaijan, preserving its independence until 705 CE.

During this period, alongside the indigenous ancient tribes inhabiting the region, there was also a significant influx of migrant Turkic tribes—including the Huns, Bulgars, Gängars, Savirs, Khazars, and others—who settled in the lowland areas.

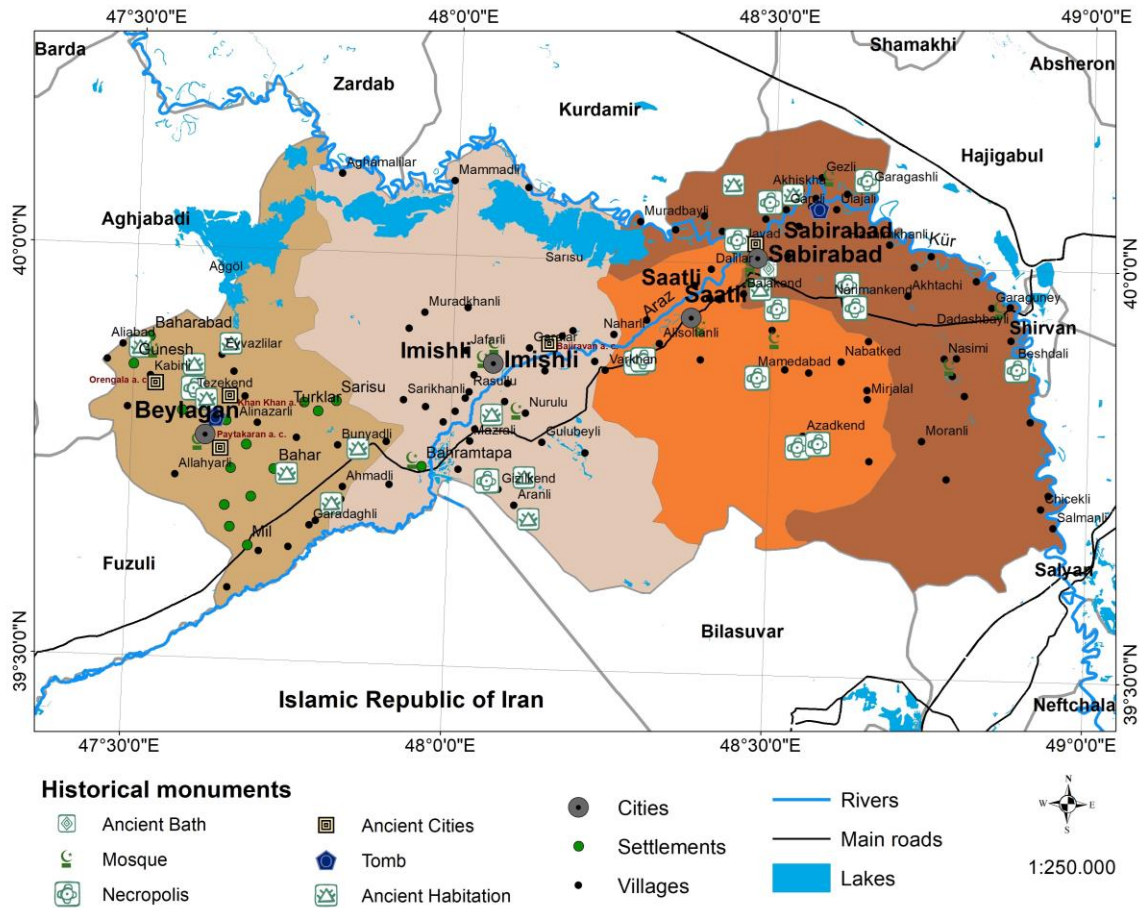


Figure 1. Cultural, historical and archaeological monuments in the Mil-Mugan economic region

In the middle stage, covering the period from the 7th to the 15th centuries CE, Arran was incorporated into the Arab Caliphate from the late 7th to the 10th centuries. During this time, the majority of the population embraced Islam, and the migration of Arab tribes into the lowland areas led to new settlement patterns. The Rabi'a tribe settled in Arran, while the 'Awdi tribe established themselves in Mughan [12].

The era of Arab civilization in Azerbaijan was marked by the emergence of Eastern Islamic-type cities. Among these were Beylaqan, Mughan, Barzand, Varsan, and Kiran. In the 9th–10th centuries, Azerbaijani cities transformed from small fortified settlements into major administrative-political, commercial-craft, and cultural centers. At that time, cities typically consisted of a citadel (narinqala), an inner town (shahristan), and a suburb (rabad).

Arab scholars referred to the language of Barda and the Arran population as the "Arranian language," which was in fact an evolved form of an ancient Turkic language. This language was spoken by the Gargars, Albanians, Utis, Pechenegs, Kangars, and others [2].

During the 11th–12th centuries, the Seljuk state flourished in the North Caucasus, and new waves of Turkic migration intensified. Tribes such as the Ayrum, Shamli, Baydilli, Takla, Inalli, Qaraman, Ahmadli, Aydinli, and Imirli settled across wide territories, with the largest concentration in Arran [9].

In the 12th–13th centuries, under the rule of the Atabegs, both the economy and culture experienced remarkable prosperity, accompanied by the settlement of Oghuz tribes in Arran. It is no coincidence that the 12th century is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Azerbaijani culture. During this period, the major cities of Arran included Barda and Beylaqan, while in Mughan the principal urban centers were Mughan, Bacravan, Barzand, Bilasuvar, Mahmudabad, and Hamshahra.

In the Mongol era, numerous Mongol-Turkic tribes and clans—such as the Sulduz-Chobani, Jalair, Qurgan, Kingit, Sunit, Ongut, Tatar, Oirat, Dolan, Alar, Uran, Alet, as well as others—settled in the region, accompanied by nearly 200,000 Turkic families. Arran and Mughan served as the winter pastures of the Ilkhanids, while Karabakh

was used as summer pastures. During this period, the Bayat, Qajar, Afshar, and Quman tribes also established themselves in Azerbaijan.

The incoming groups were divided into two categories: the Uighur Turks and the Turkicized Mongols [12].

During the 13th–14th centuries, under the Mongol invasions, not only the city of Beylaqan but also Mughan and Baciravan were destroyed and turned into ruins. In the period of the Ilkhanids, the Mil-Mughan territory became a winter pasture, while Uighur Turks and Mongol tribes settled in these lands.

In the 15th century, when the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu dynasties came to power, their respective tribes established themselves in Arran - first the Qara Qoyunlu, and later the Aq Qoyunlu - settling around ancient homelands and their surrounding areas. Among these were the Saatli, Sadli, Barani, Chagirli, Takla, Baharli, Alpaut, Kabirli, and other tribes, which made these territories their place of residence.

The new stage (from the 16th century to the early 20th century) marked the first time in history that the whole of Azerbaijan was united as a single state under the Safavid dynasty. During this period, Arran was divided into two beylerbeyliks: the Mil-Karabakh plains were incorporated into Karabakh, while the remaining territories were assigned to Shirvan.

In the 16th century, the Qizilbash tribes, and later in the 17th–18th centuries the Shahsevan tribes, established new layers of settlement. In the 1740s, the era of the khanates began. In the eastern part of the Shirvan plain the Shirvan Khanate was formed, while in its central part arose the Shaki Khanate. In the Mil-Karabakh plains, the Karabakh Khanate was established; in the Mughan plain, the Javad Khanate; and in the Salyan plain, the Salyan Khanate.

At the beginning of the 19th century, internal conflicts among the khanates prevented the formation of a unified state, which in turn paved the way for wars between Russia and Iran over the Caucasus. As a result, the territory of Arran was completely occupied and, under the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, was incorporated into the Russian Empire. During this period, the Khan of Shirvan resettled 6,000 families in Mughan [4, p. 36].

The resistance of the local population against Russian forces led to the destruction of the cities of Javad and Baciravan, as well as the devastation of villages. The mass exodus of local inhabitants

created favorable conditions for the settlement of Russians and Ukrainians in the region. In the 1830s, the Mil-Mughan area was incorporated into the Shirvan Province, from 1840 into the Shamakhi Governorate, from 1859 into the Baku Governorate, and from 1869 it became part of the Javad District of this governorate. This administrative division remained in effect until 1929 [12].

The first Russian settlements in Mughan began in the 1860s. While in 1909 there were only 13 Russian villages, by 1918 their number had increased to 52 across the Mughan and Salyan plains. On the site of the former city of Javad, the town-type settlement of Petropavlovka was established in 1888. Its population stood at 1,467 in 1914, and 1,288 in 1923 [17].

With the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, Russians left these territories; however, after the Soviet government was established, they returned and resettled in 34 villages in Mughan. The central parts of the Mughan and Salyan plains served as winter pastures for the nomadic Shahsevan tribes. According to the 1870 census, the Shahsevan population numbered 74,700, with 12,450 tents, organized into 15 clans. In 1885, the Tsarist government prohibited their entry into Mughan, but those who accepted Russian subjecthood were allowed to settle there.

In the early 20th century, new Russian villages were founded along the newly constructed irrigation canals: 18 along the Middle Canal, 13 along the Azizbeyov Canal, 8 along the Bolgar River, and several others along different canals. This migration continued into the early Soviet period; in 1925, a segment of Shahsevan migrants from Iran accepted Soviet citizenship and settled in various villages, while those who did not were placed separately in eight distinct villages.

In the Mughan-Salyan plains, settlement was concentrated along riverbanks: there were 32 local villages along the Kura River and 35 along the Araz River [4].

The study of population change in the Mil-Mughan region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been carried out on the basis of census materials conducted first in Russia and later in the Soviet Union (Table 1). During this period, the territory was entirely incorporated into the Javad district, with the exception of the Beylaqan area, which was included within the Jabrayil district.

Table 1

Population of the Mil-Mughan Region between 1870 and 1939 (in thousands)

Districts and Regions	1870	1886	1897	1916	1926	1939
Javad	46,4	93,6	93,8	162,3	132,0	249,1
Beylagan	12,0	14,0	15,0	17,5	23,5	19,5

Source: Eminov, 2022, p. 102, Table 1.7.24.

Table 2

Changes in Population across Administrative Districts (in thousands)

Administrative Districts	1939		1959		1970		1959-1970 growth %
	total	city	total	city	total	city	
Saatly	-	-	25,2	5,9	44,3	6,6	75,8
Sabirabad	53,5	6,3	52,2	8,9	85,9	13,4	64,6
Beylagan	15,3	4,2	29,8	4,2	48,5	9,5	62,8
Imishli	34,5	2,3	36,6	10,5	59,7	20,4	63,1

Source: [4, s. 106, table.1.7.26.) and census materials

Between 1870 and 1886, the population of the Javad district more than doubled, which was primarily linked to the settlement of the Shahsevan tribes in the area. However, due to subsequent policies of resettling part of the Shahsevan population out of Mughan, no further significant growth was observed. From 1897 to 1916, the population increased rapidly, largely as a result of the resettlement of Russians into the region. In fact, between 1907 and 1916 alone, more than 20,000 Russians were settled in Mughan, which also led to the displacement of the Shahsevan from their native lands.

As a continuation of Tsarist policies, the Bolsheviks, through the involvement of Armenians and Cossacks in Mughan, carried out mass atrocities against Azerbaijanis in 1918–1919. After the establishment of Soviet power in 1920, these repressions continued under the labels of “müsavətçi”, “qolçomaq,” and “dindar” [4]. As a result, the population decreased by more than 60,000 between 1916 and 1926.

During the Soviet period, the administrative-territorial structure of Mil-Mughan underwent significant changes. In 1930, the districts of Imishli and Sabirabad were established, followed by Beylagan in 1939 and Saatly in 1943. With the creation of these districts, the settlements of Sabirabad and Imishli, and later Beylagan and Saatly, were granted township status. Subsequently, these settlements were elevated to city status: Sabirabad in 1935, Imishli in 1960, Beylagan in 1966, and Saatly in 1971.

Between 1948 and 1958, more than 100,000 Azerbaijani Turks were deported from Armenia, part of whom were resettled in the districts of Saatly and Sabirabad. Later, between 1958 and

1968, up to 30,000 Meskhetian Turks arriving from Central Asia were also settled in these areas [4]. In Beylagan district, Meskhetian Turks began to settle following their deportation from Georgia in 1944 and especially after 1958 [8].

Between 1939 and 1959, population change across the administrative districts was relatively modest, with the exception of Beylagan, where the influx of migrants from Western Azerbaijan led to rapid growth. During 1959–1970, the population increased 1.6–1.7 times, a rise largely attributable to both higher natural population growth and the resettlement of tens of thousands of Meskhetian Turks in the districts of Sabirabad, Saatly, and Beylagan.

In this period, the urban population of Imishli and Beylagan districts more than doubled. In 1960, the settlement of Bahramtapa (formerly Birmay, Imishli district) was granted township status, followed by Qahramanli (Beylagan district) in 1966.

3. Conclusion

The historical and geographical settlement of the Mil-Mughan plain has undergone major stages of development from ancient times to the modern era. Research indicates that this territory, owing to its geographical position and natural resources, has long been attractive to human settlement. The principal residential areas were concentrated along the banks of the Kura and Araz rivers, while in the 20th century new settlement centers emerged with the construction of irrigation canals.

At the same time, since the 19th century, the Mil-Mughan plain has witnessed significant demographic changes and migration processes. In particular, the establishment of Russian villages during the Tsarist period and population resettlement

ments under Soviet administrative divisions had a profound impact on the settlement structure. Historical sources reveal that the region has held great importance since antiquity as a center of agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, and craftsmanship, and it was situated along the Silk Road. In the Middle Ages, its largest city was Beylagan.

In terms of historical and cultural heritage, the region represents one of the country's richest areas, distinguished by its ancient settlements and archaeological monuments.

Proposals:

1. Expansion of historical-archaeological research – Conducting more in-depth scientific investigations and uncovering new archaeological findings in the Mil-Mughan plain would contribute to a better understanding of the region's history.

2. Development of tourism – The Mil-Mughan region holds broad opportunities for strengthening its historical, religious, and cultural tourism potential. In particular, its ancient settlements—such as the historic city of Beylagan—should be integrated into tourism routes.

3. Formulation of economic development strategies – Special projects should be developed to foster the growth of agriculture and industry by utilizing the region's historical and geographical potential.

Activities carried out in these directions can both preserve the historical and geographical significance of the Mil-Mughan plain and contribute to its socio-economic development.

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MIL-MUĞAN DÜZÜNÜN TARIXI-COĞRAFI MƏSKUNLAŞMASI XÜSUSİYYƏTLƏRİ

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Xülasə. Məqalədə Mil-Muğan iqtisadi rayonunun tarixi məskunlaşması qədim dövrdən müasir dövrə kimi inkişaf mərhələləri üzrə təhlil edilmiş, ərazinin tarixi-arxeoloji abidələri araşdırılmışdır. Mil-Muğan düzünün tarixi-coğrafi xüsusiyyətlərinin təhlili bu yerlərin böyük hissəsinin tarixən qışlaq olması ilə fərqləndirmişdir. Təhlillər nəticəsində müəyyən edilmişdir ki, daimi yaşayış məskənlərinin çoxu Kür və Araz çaylarının sahilində olmuş, XX əsrin əvvəli və ortaları yeni salınan məskənlər yeni çəkilən kanalların sahilində olması ilə bağlı olmuşdur. Məqalədə həmçinin XIX əsrdən XX əsrin 70-ci illərinə kimi əhali sayının dəyişməsi, miqrasiya proseslərini, çarizm dövründə Muğan ərazisində aparılan siyasət nəticəsində yerli əhalisi sayılan şahsevənlərin qışlaq yerlərində rus kəndlərinin salınması araşdırmaları aparılmışdır.

Açar sözlər: Mil-Muğan düzü, məskunlaşma tarixi, qədim şəhərlər, şəhər, miqrasiya