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Research paper

Leonid S. Ilykov,
Cand. Sci. (History), Senior Researcher
Southern Scientific Center of RAS, Rostov-on-Don, Russia
leonidilukov@gmail.com

Andrey Yu. Melnikov,
Senior Archeologist
LLC “OKN-Proekt”, Roston-on-Don, Russia
andrey_melnikov_v@mayl.ru

BURIALS WITH KNIFE-SHAPED BLADES FROM THE DON REGION AND THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Abstract. In the steppes of Eastern Europe, a whole series of burials were uncovered in simple pits, in which the deceased were buried on their backs, with their legs tucked up, knees up. Their outstretched or half-bent arms lay along the body, hands near the hips, sometimes in the groin area. A flint knife-shaped blade was also discovered there. The bones were richly dyed with ochre. The buried from the Lukovsky I burial ground in the Mozdok district of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, explored in 2017 by the archaeological expedition of LLC “OKN-Proekt” (Rostov-on-Don) complements this series of burials, which S.N. Korenevsky attributes to the proto-Yamna period. The use of knife-shaped blades in the funeral rite is not limited to the framework of the Eneolithic period. They are also found in the burials of the Middle Bronze Age. Since this sample group is characterized by the position of the deceased in simple grave pits, it is questionable to include in it undercut and catacomb structures, in which archaic elements of the funeral rite and grave goods are found. A flint knife with a leather handle was not only a “meat knife”, but also a tool for performing surgical operations. It was used to perform operations to apply cuts (tattoos) to the surface of the skin, as well as to perform rituals associated with phallic cults that emerged in a patriarchal society, where the role of men increased. The placement of a flint blade between the thighs, in the groin area, between the palms, suggests its symbolic meaning. A flint blade was used in performing circumcision of the foreskin, in cult sacrifice.

Keywords: Eneolithic-Early Bronze Age; proto-Yamna culture; rectangular pit; knife-shaped blade; flint blade – tool for surgical operations.

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Исследовательская статья

Леонид Сергеевич Ильюков
к.и.н., старший научный сотрудник,
Южный научный центр РАН, Ростов-на-Дону, Россия
leonidilukov@gmail.com

Андрей Юрьевич Мельников
старший археолог,
ООО «ОКН-проект», Ростов-на-Дону, Россия
andrey_melnikov_v@mayl.ru

ПОГРЕБЕНИЯ С НОЖЕВИДНЫМИ ПЛАСТИНАМИ ИЗ ПОДОНЬЯ И СЕВЕРНОГО КАВКАЗА

Аннотация. В степях Восточной Европы обнаружена целая серия погребений в простых ямах, в которых умерших хоронили в положении на спине, с поджатыми ногами, коленями вверх. Вытянутые или полусогнутые руки лежали вдоль туловища, их кисти находились около бедер, иногда в районе паха. Там же находилась кремневая ножевидная пластина. Костяки были обильно окрашены охрой. Погребенный из Луковского I могильника в Моздокском районе Республики Северная Осетия-Алания, исследованного в 2017 г. археологической экспедицией ООО «ОКН-проект» (Ростов-на-Дону) дополняет эту серию захоронений, которые С.Н. Кореневский относит к доямному времени. Использование ножевидных пластин в погребальном обряде не ограничено рамками энеолитического времени. Они встречаются в погребениях эпохи средней бронзы. Поскольку для данной выборки характерно положение умерших в простых ямах, сомнительно включать в нее подбойные и катакомбные конструкции, в которых встречены архаичные элементы погребального обряда и инвентаря. Кремневый нож с кожаной рукоятью являлся не только «мясным ножом», но и инструментом для проведения хирургических операций. Им проводили операции по нанесению на поверхность кожи нарезов (татуировки), а также для выполнения ритуалов, связанных с фаллическими культами, сложившихся в патриархальном обществе, где возросла роль мужчин. Размещение кремневой пластины между бедер, в районе паха, между ладонями, позволило предположить о ее знаковом назначении. Кремневым лезвием совершали обрезание крайней плоти, совершая ею жертвоприношение в культовых целях.

Ключевые слова: эпоха энеолита-ранней бронзы; протоямная культура; прямоугольная яма; ножевидная пластина; кремневый нож – инструмент для хирургических операций.

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At the dawn of the Bronze Age, sites of the proto-Yamna culture were widespread in the Eastern European and pre-Caucasian steppes [1].

In 2017, in the Mozdok district of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, near the Lukovskaya station, the burial mound of Lukovskaya I, located on the left bank of the Terek River, was explored (Fig. 1; 2).

Kurgan 1 had a height of 0.7 m, a diameter of 30 m. Three mounds were discovered in it, Mound 1 being the oldest and consisting of gray-brown loam. Its height was 0.56 m. Under it was the main Burial 12. Inlet Burial 9 cut through the original mound¹.

Burial 9. The depth of the burial is 2.16 m from the zero-reference point. The burial is located 3 m to the southeast of Burial 12. At the top, the pit had an oval shape with rounded corners, stretched along the E–W line. Its dimensions are 1.9×2.0 m. A wooden floor rested on ledges 0.37–0.45 m wide on all sides. The depth of the pit below the ledges was 0.63 m. The skeleton of a 12–15-year-old teenager² was found at the bottom. The buried was lying on their back in a flexed position, knees up, head oriented to the east. The arms were stretched out along the torso. Pink and brown spots were recorded on the bottom of the burial. Five talus bones of a sheep were found along the left forearm (Fig. 3–5).

Burial 12 was discovered in the south-western sector at a depth of 1.75 m from the zero-reference point. The sub-rectangular pit with a long axis was oriented along the ENE–WSW line. Its dimensions are 2.2 × 1.4 m. The depth is 0.55 m (1.7 from the zero-reference point). Charcoal was found in its filling. The skeleton of a man 25–35 years old lay at the bottom. The deceased was placed on his back in a flexed position, knees up, head oriented to the ENE. The hands were rested in the groin area. Traces of injuries – two on the frontal bone and two on the parietal – could be seen on the skull. The right tibia was broken during the person's lifetime. Thick layers of red paint up to 2 cm thick were observed on the bones of the skeleton's torso and under them (Fig. 6; 7; 10).

In the groin area between the hands, the proximal end of a light gray flint blade lying on the rib was found. This end was likely a handle and was wrapped with a leather belt. Its length is 7.4 cm (Fig. 8; 11).

A spot of red paint (8×20 cm, up to 2 cm thick) was observed at the bottom of the grave. It was recorded along the right arm and broke at the right forearm next to a large “egg”, the shell of which was made of a layer of bark. The “egg” consisted of yellow and red paint layers. Its dimensions are 12×9×8 cm (Fig. 9). The spot of red paint and the “egg with paint” located along the arm of the buried might possibly be a symbolic anthropomorphic figure that was oriented towards the ENE. Next to it were the remains of the man with an injured head.

Judging by the funeral rite, both burials in this mound are similar, but differ stratigraphically in time. Of particular interest is the egg-shaped artifact with a brown crust, which contained paint powder. A similar object in the form of an unbaked mud lump found in the catacomb in the burial ground “Novy” contained a square box, at the bottom of which lay three miniature raw anthropomorphic figurines [2, p. 106, Fig. 2, 5]. In one of the burials

1. *Ilyukov L.S.* Report on the conduct of rescue archaeological excavations at the burial mounds “Lukovsky-I”, “Lukovsky-II” and “Kurgan 5 at Lukovsky station” in Mozdok district of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania in 2017 // Archive of IA RAS. R-1. No. 56595. Vol. 3. Fig. 20, 22.

2. The anthropological estimation was carried out by the Candidate of Biological Sciences E.F. Batieva.

of the North Caucasian culture, an imitation of a half of a “nut shell” made of ceramics was found near alabaster figurines. On its convex surface there was a cross-shaped pattern in the form of a pair of drawn lines that intersect a roller covered with a ribbon with notches that imitated a rope. At the ends of the roller, a pair of holes were pierced for hanging the shell³. According to A.A. Kleshchenko, it was a ceramic model of a cradle [3, p. 36]. Among the East Slavic peoples, a real or clay egg was placed in a coffin together with the deceased, since it was a symbol of resurrection [4, p. 170]. In the Lukovsky burial, a case in the form of an “egg” was used, the halves of which were made of bark. It contained paint powder, that was sprinkled on the deceased for symbolic resurrection in the afterlife.

A.L. Nechitailo and S.N. Korenevsky observed a number of burials with knife-shaped blades from early burial complexes [1; 5]. They are recorded in the large corpus of the Don burials, compiled by A.V. Faifert [6]. These works provide plans for the location of complexes on the territory of this region. Such complexes were included in the catalogue of Novodanilovsky sites [7]. A number of complexes in simple grave pits are worth noting. The deceased were buried in a flexed position on their backs, knees up, head oriented to the east. In these burials, ochre was often used.

Veselaya Roscha II Kurgan 15, Burial 1. On the chest of the buried lay a pectoral cross made of a boar’s fang. At the left elbow, a blade 11 cm long lay across the chest [8, p. 173, 174].

Veselaya Roscha III Kurgan 24, Burial 3. Two fragments of a 10 cm long blade were found near the vertex of the buried. A blade 8 cm long was found next to it, and a retouched blade with sharp ends 11 cm long was revealed near the left clavicle [9, pp. 136, 137, fig. 16, 3-6; 17, 1-3].

Komarovo Kurgan 2, Burial 18. In the right hand there was a retouched blade with sharp ends 13 cm long. Near the right shoulder – two short bladelets with blunted edges, 5 and 8 cm long, respectively.

Komarovo Kurgan 7, Burial 9. A blade with a sharp end 17.2 cm long was found next to the left shoulder of the buried [1, p. 24, fig. 16, 1-3].

Galyugaevskaya Kurgan 1, Burial 4. A blade with a broken distal end, 5 cm long, was found near the pelvis [1, p. 22, Fig. 13, 2,3].

Progress-2 Kurgan 1, Burial 37. A blade was discovered at the right wrist, the distal end facing the right hip, its handle was likely next to the hand. The lateral faces and the end of the blade were retouched, the length – 12.2 cm long. A blade without retouching with a length of 6.7 cm was found near the same hand [10, p. 156, Fig. 2].

Progress-2 Kurgan 4. Two burials with knife-shaped blades were uncovered in the kurgan. Burials 9 and 12 were contemporaneous, since two fragments of ceramics from one vessel were found in these burials.

Burial 9. A blade without retouching was found near the southern wall with a length of 14 cm [10, p. 157, Fig. 5].

Burial 12. Near the left elbow there was a non-retouched blade with a length of 13.6 cm. The distal end of it rested on the side of the buried. The radiocarbon date of this burial attributes it to 4228-4066 BC [10, pp. 157, 158, fig. 6].

3. We express our gratitude to V.A. Babenko for this message. Бабенко.

Konstantinovskoe plateau Kurgan 6. Two burials with knife-shaped blades were uncovered in the kurgan.

Burial 26. A blade 8 cm long was found in the hand, its proximal end had a leather handle, and the distal end was directed to the legs [10, p. 160, fig. 8; 9].

Burial 28. A blade was found in the right hand with a beveled distal sharp end, the length is 8 cm [10, p. 160, 161, fig. 10; 11].

Verkhny Akbash Kurgan, Burial 11. A blade 8.5 cm long lay in the right hand, its proximal end was broken off [1, p. 21, 22, Fig. 10, 1-5].

Novy Arshti (Bamut burial ground) Kurgan 6. The skeleton lay on its back, prone, with its head directed to the SWW. A blade with a sharp end lay at the right shoulder, one of its lateral faces was retouched [11, pp. 139, 140, Fig. 49, 2; Table XXI, II].

Kyzburun Kurgan, Burial 23. In the left hand there was a blade with a sharp tip, 10.8 cm long [1, p. 27, fig. 12, 1-3; 12, p. 106].

Suvorovsky Kurgan 1, Burial 4. The right hand held a blade with a sharp tip 19 cm long [13, p. 5, Fig. 3, 1, 2].

Kastyrsky VIII Kurgan 13, Burial 2. A 7 cm long blade lay on the lumbar vertebrae, the distal end was straight, one edge was partially retouched [14, p. 22, Fig. 4-9].

Kastyrsky VIII Kurgan 14, Burial 15. A 10.9 cm long blade was found under the femurs, in the groin area, with both sides and the distal end partially retouched [14, p. 22, Fig. 5].

Krasnogorovka III Kurgan 5, Burial 8. Among the phalanges of the right hand there was a blade 10 cm long, its distal end was sharp [5, p. 49, fig. 6, 1-3].

Krasnogorovka III Kurgan 5, Burial 17. Two fragments of a blade 9 cm long were found next to the right hand and under the right pelvic bone [5, p. 49, 50 Fig. 6, 4, 5; 6, p. 247, 248].

Mukhin I Kurgan 3, Burial 6. A blade knife lay on the waist, both sides of which were partially retouched. The distal end was straight, the knife length was 14.8 cm [15, Fig. 7, 3, 4].

Zolotie gorki Burial 4 (1988). A partially retouched blade 7 cm long was found on the right iliac bone. A fragment of a blade with a length of 1.7 cm was revealed in the filling of the pit [16, p. 98, Fig. 1, 4; 2, 2].

Moskva I Kurgan 1, Burial 6. Sheep bones (limbs and pelvis) and 19 flint finds (4 nuclei with imprints from blade 5-6 cm long) were recorded on the ancient horizon. The main Burial 6 overlapped Burial 7 with no equipment, in which the deceased had a pose similar to those described above. In Burial 6, a blade 18.7 cm long was found, its proximal end was retouched from the sides. The blade lay along the right hand and was pressed down by the phalanx of the thumb, which was on its handle [17, p. 120, Fig. 4, 4, 5; 24].

Kobyakovskoye site, necropolis (2004) Kurgan 1. Two burials of the same rite were uncovered in the Kurgan (Burials 5 and 7). A fragment of a pectoral cross was found in Burial 5 [6, pp. 132, 133, fig. 97]. The skull of a bull was revealed in Burial 7 on the ceiling, which rested on the ledges. There was a blade with a retouched end, placed in the pelvis area. Traces of retouching on its edges were observed in the middle part of the object and on its rim, being the handle; length – 22.4 cm [6, p. 133, fig. 97].

Nedvigovka Kurgan 29, Burial 1. Paired burial of adults directed to the SSW. A blade with a broken end 7 cm long was found near the forearm of one of the buried [18, pp. 156, 157, Fig. 3].

Vogoyavlenovskiy I Kurgan 26, Burial 33. A ruined burial. A blade with retouched edges was found, its sharp distal end was bilaterally retouched, which allows us to consider this piece as a “dagger”; length – 14 cm [6, Fig. 136].

Lapovsky I Kurgan 1, Burial 1. An arc-shaped piece with a length of 14.6 cm was found on the waist, the edges of which were partially retouched; the second piece with a length of 12.1 cm without retouching was found next to it, in the groin area [6, p. 207, Fig. 156].

Kuleshovka 1 (1982) Kurgan 1, Burial 34. Near the right elbow was a retouched blade 10.3 cm long, the distal end was retouched from the back and ventral face [19, Fig. 19, 8, 9].

Tuzluki Kurgan 9, Burial 27. The deceased was flexed on the right side, the head oriented to the west. A blade with an acute distal end 8.7 cm long was found on the thorax [6, p. 344, fig. 145].

Azhinov II Kurgan 2, Burial 5. The grave pit located above the sagging catacomb chamber was mistakenly described as a pit with a niche-undercut [20, Table II, 1, 3]. The buried was lying on their back, crouched, the head oriented to the NW. Two fragments of a 4.5 cm long bladelet were found in the filling of the pit [6, p. 385, Fig. 286; 20, p. 15, Table. VI, 13, 14].

Sagvansky I Kurgan 4, Burial 22. The skeleton of an adult, oriented with their head to the west. A 3.5 cm long bladelet was found in the filling of the pit, the distal end of which was fragmented [6, p. 391, fig. 291].

Ryabichev Kurgan 3, Burial 21. The flexed skeleton was oriented to the SW. At the top, a flint conical nucleus was found, from which 2.5 cm long blades were chipped. Two blades with a length of 6.3 cm and 6.5 cm were found near the left shoulder [21, pp. 41, 42, fig. 12, 1-6].

Popov Kurgan 31/7, Burial 4. The skeleton of a child oriented to the south. Next to it were flint blades 8 cm long [22, pp. 384-386, fig. 27].

Tonnely-6 Kurgan 1, Burial 6. Under the right hand of the buried was the proximal end of the blade lying on a rib, the length of the blade was 14.2 cm. The edges were retouched [1, p. 30, fig. 26; 27].

Peregruznoe Kurgan 13, Burial 7. Near the skull lay a fragment of a blade with retouched edges, length – 8 cm. Along the right hand lay a flint dagger with retouched edges and a sharp end, the length of the dagger was 24.6 cm. Apparently, its handle touched the index finger of the right hand [1, p. 37, fig. 37, 1, 5-20].

Baturinskaya II Kurgan 3. Two burials with knife-shaped blades were uncovered in the kurgan (Burials 14 and 30).

Burial 14. In the groin area there was a blade with a beveled face of one of the distal ends 8 cm long [1, pp. 38, 39, fig. 38, 1, 2; 23, fig. 1, 16]

Burial 20. In the groin area there was a blade with one 16 cm long longitudinal edge being retouched [1, pp. 38, 39, fig. 38, 3,4; 24, fig.1, 31].

A distinctive feature of this sample group is the presence of flint knife-shaped blades in the equipment, which were usually used as meat knives. During the initiation ceremony, such blades could be used to cut on the human body, so that in the future these signs would allow the deceased to “find” his ancestors in the afterlife⁴.

4. Knife (praslav. «nož» from «noziti» – «to pierce; to impale») is primarily a piercing (based on the etymology of the word), as well as a cutting tool. It is conceivable, that the Indo-European piercing and cutting tool (h)nsi, «sword» was originally a flint knife or dagger [24, p. 436]. The ancient Indian military weapon asi – «sword», «cut», Latin assis – «sword».

S.N. Korenevsky points to the fact that there was a connection between the buried and knife-shaped blades. It might have been conditioned by the mythological beliefs of ancient people. In his sample group, in 28 cases, the knife-shaped blade was put in the right hand of the buried, or was placed at their hip [1, p. 94]. In the early Bronze Age, the flint knife-shaped blade gave way to bronze knives.

In this group, the deceased with an orientation to the east were buried in simple grave pits in a flexed position on their backs, legs bent, knees raised up. The outstretched or half-bent arms lay along the body, their hands were placed near the hips or in the groin area. A knife-shaped blade was put between the hands. Only thanks to the handle, its blade retained the position “on the edge” in the grave, which is rarely recorded during archaeological excavations (Lukovsky I, Tonnelny-6). The knife was often observed in the groin area (Baturinskaya I, Mukhin I, Krasnogorovka III Kurgan 5 Burial 8, Kastyrsky VIII Kurgan 14; Kobyakovo settlement, necropolis; Konstantinovskiy I; Konstantinovskiy plateau), near the legs (Tanais) or on the lumbar vertebrae (Kastirsky VIII Kurgan 13). The legs of the buried fell apart in a shape of a rhombus; in this burial, the equipment comprised two blades: one was not retouched and was located in the groin area, and the second, with retouched edges, was in the pelvis area, but away from the groin area. Less often, a blade was placed near the right hand (Peregruznoe Kurgan 13, Tonnelny, Suvorovskaya, Progress-2, Konstantinovskoe Plateau, Kurgan 6) or under it (Moskva I). Sometimes it was placed in the left hand (Kyzburun), or next to it (Veselaya Roscha II), or near the left elbow (Progress-2 Kurgan 4). If in the burial the knife was found between the palms, then its sharp end was oriented to the feet of the buried. In the burial ground “Novy”, a case with a bronze knife lay on the mannequin’s waist. In rare cases, the ends of a long blade were sharpened, its edges retouched. Such a blade can likely be considered as a dagger. It was at the left collarbone (Veselaya Roscha III) or in the right hand (Komarovo kurgan 2). In two cases, the triangular end of the blade was hewn on both sides, which makes it possible to consider it as a dagger (Kuleshovka I, Bogoyavlenskiy I). The end of the Mukhin obsidian blade was processed similarly.

During the funeral rite, the blade would sometimes be broken and placed in different spots of the burial space (Shlyakhovskiy, Galyugaevskaya, Verkhny Akbash, Krasnogorovka III Kurgan 5, Burial 17).

A number of burials with the western orientation date from a later time than the east-oriented deceased (Tuzluki Kurgan 9; Sagvanskiy I). In two graves, short blades were located at the elbow (Azhinov II), at the left (Ryabichev) or right shoulder (Novy Arshti Kurgan 6). Children’s burial with a northern orientation from the burial ground in the farmstead Popov was accompanied by a pointed-base vessel and blades with three sections.

In one case, two long blades were found near the “package” of human bones collected from a niche (?), and 15 more short blade sections were found near them (Peregruznoe Kurgan 10, Burial 7). The burial recovered at the farmstead Verkhne-Podpolny dates back to the early Bronze Age, where in a rectangular pit lay a skeleton flexed on the right side, oriented with its head to the west. At its head was a two-handed korchaga (large clay pot) with a pearl ornament. On the right shoulder of the buried lay a slightly curved bone blade with a triangular cross-section. It was likely an imitation of a flint blade [19, pp. 107, 108, fig. 81, 2; 84, 1].

In one burial, under the knees of the deceased was a diorite scepter (Shlyakhovsky), in another – a bone rod with a flattened pommel (Komarovo Kurgan 2) or a long tibia bustard (?) (Komarovo Kurgan 7). A similar 17.3 cm long bone rod with the same pommel was discovered in the Zapadenki farmstead (Kurgan 1, Burial 11) [19, pp. 60, 69, fig. 33, 8].

Nuclei are rarely found in the burials. Four flint wedge- and prismatic-shaped nuclei for chipping blades with a length of 12.0-10.5 cm were found in the Berdanosovsky burial [25, pp. 147-148, Fig. 1]. Sometimes traces of production were found on the ancient horizon, among which wedge-shaped nuclei were also represented. Next to them was a grave, the equipment of which comprised a knife-shaped blade [17, Fig. 1. 8, 9; 4, 4, 5].

In the Ciscaucasia, the longest blades exceed 15 cm in length; finds of more than 20 cm have been recorded on the Lower Don, and in the Varna burial ground with a size of more than 40 cm [1, pp. 75, 85].

The presence of axes, arrowheads and blades is of interest.

Flint wedge-shaped axes were revealed at the left elbow of the buried (Krasnogorovka III Kurgan 5, Burial 8), under the pelvis (Verkhny Akbash), on the chest or at the right shoulder (Komarovo Kurgan 2, Burial 18; Kastyrsky VIII Kurgan 14, Burial 15). We highlight two burials in Kurgan 3 of the Shlyakhovsky burial ground. In one of them (Burial 3), a diorite scepter was found near the skeleton of a man under an ochre “flat cake” located under the bones of bent legs. Under it lay a flint triangular dart tip, and next to it were three flint blade chips and a long, broken knife-shaped blade. The proximal end of this blade was uncovered in the neighboring Burial 4, placed in a similar fashion. In this burial, a trapezoidal flint axe with a polished blade lay near the right knee. And in Burial 3 from this kurgan at the right shoulder of the buried lay two axes: flint and argillite ones.

Triangular arrowheads were observed in three complexes (Krasnogorovka III; Veselaya Roscha III; Peregruznoe). In each of them, the knife-shaped blade was broken. In the burial at the Verkhny Akbash, the proximal end of the knife-shaped blade was broken off, whereas in the Galyugaevsky kurgan, it was the distal end. A small fragment of a flint blade was found in the Zolotie Gorki. The tradition of breaking a knife-shaped blade during a funeral ritual persisted in the Early Bronze Age (Sagvansky I Kurgan 4; Azhinov II Kurgan 2).

In the Copper-Stone Age, changes in the social life of people manifested in funeral practice. Cenotaphs appeared. Sometimes the deceased was replaced by a funeral doll that accompanied the remains of dead people. A special place was occupied by scenes of ritual damage to certain items, including flint knives.

In the burial ground “Novy” in Kurgan 132, a cenotaph was discovered (Burial 13), next to two graves (Burials 23 and 25), which contained the remains of people who died from arrows with flint flag-shaped tips. In Burial 13, the doll made of organic material was decorated with a large necklace of deer teeth, and the waist was belted with a ribbon embroidered with vertical rows of paste beads. A bronze knife was attached to it, which resembles bilaterally retouched flint knives [26, p. 38, fig. 10, 9; 11, 2]. A rectangular blade made of an animal’s fang (a pectoral symbol?) and a bone piercer were found near the necklace, and a bronze arc-shaped piercer – near the waist. In this burial, flint arrowheads were found next to the “anthropomorphic figure”: two halves of a broken leaf-shaped spear tip and two flag-shaped arrowheads, one of which was incomplete.

On the Lower Don V.Ya. Kiyashko was the first to identify a group of Eneolithic burials, for which flexed positions on the back or left side and eastern orientation were typical. Among the burial equipment, he noted flint tools on blades [27, p. 12]. Yatsenko V.S. attributes burials with knife-shaped blades to the first group of Don Eneolithic burials [19, p. 49].

Did there really exist several forms of burial structures in the steppes of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus at that time, from a simple pit to a complex structure in the form of a catacomb burial?

Along with simple pits, pits with an undercut were uncovered there (Aigursky Kurgan 2, Burial 17; Kursavsky-3 Kurgan 1, Burial 15; Kardoninskaya, Burial 2; Peregruznoe 10, Burial 7; Sharakhalsun-3 Kurgan 5, Burial 8), and more complex structures in the form of catacombs (Mukhin II, Burial 9; Giurgiulești Burial 1, 2, 3).

Aigursky-2 Kurgan 17, Burial 6. The walls of the oval pit were 0.3-0.4 m deep. The bottom was divided by a transverse step into two halves. The step height was 0.1 m. Was that depression in the pit an undercut? Under a layer of loam, richly saturated with ochre, a human skeleton was uncovered. There were stones above the skeleton “in the upper layers of the filling” [1, p. 20]. The vertical walls of the “undercut” had no traces of ceiling, the “shaft” itself was crossed by a wide hole⁵. The deceased was buried on the back, in a flexed position, knees up, head oriented to the SE. The hands rested on the pubic bones. A bone pectoral was found behind the head; next to it were a bone pin, a flint blade 10.7 cm long and a hemispherical copper plaque. Presumably, there was an organic doll about 30 cm high at the head, and a cord was attached to the ledge decorated with a convex copper plaque, to the ends of which a crescent-shaped pectoral made of a split boar’s fang was tied. Next to the pectoral there were a bone pin and a flint blade [1, pp. 19-21, Fig. 7, 8]. The flat oval pommel of the pin on one side had an edge located along its axis. It resembled the cut of the back of a knife-shaped blade [1, Fig. 8, 2].

Kursavsky-3 Kurgan 5 Burial 15. At the bottom of the oval pit of the Burial 15 two skeletons were discovered. One of them, lying along the eastern wall, was buried flexed on the back, knees up, head oriented to the SSE. The arms were stretched out along the trunk. The second skeleton was lying along the western edge of the pit [28, p. 141]. The deceased was lying on his back, with his head oriented to the south. His left arm was stretched out along the torso. Both skeletons were abundantly covered with ochre. The eastern skeleton had a 12 cm long blade near the right shoulder, and a second 9.5 cm long blade was found on the bones of the chest near the western shoulder. Dates for the two skeletons are 4219-3973 BC and 4307-3997 BC [1, pp. 26, 27, fig. 18, 19].

The assumption that Burial 15 was dug in the “H-shaped catacomb” (or “undercut”?), at which the shaft was destroyed by two Burials 1 and 14⁶, requires clarification. Both burials were at the same depth, east of Burial 15. Burial 1 was dug in soil, above the ceiling of the catacomb (Burial 15). Then Burial 14 was sunk into the north-western corner of the well of

5. Babenko V.A. Report on the rescue excavations of the burial mound “Aigursky-2” and the burial mound «Aigursky-1» at the Sovetskoe Runo state farm in the Ipatovskiy district of the Stavropol Krai. 2000 // Archive of IA RAS. P-1. No. 23452, 23453.

6. Kolesnichenko K.B. Report on the excavations of burial mounds in Kochubeyevskiy (Ivanovskiy-5, Tonnelny-8) and Andropovskiy (Kursavskiy-3, Kunakovskiy-3, Kunakovskiy-4, Nikolaevskiy-3) districts of Stavropol Krai in 2007 // Archive of IA RAS. P-1. No. 45528-45530.

catacomb 15, in which a bone tube and a fragment of a rod 11 cm long were uncovered under the right knee. The skull from Burial 14 overlapped the feet from Burial 1 [1, pp. 26, 27, fig. 18, 19].

Kardoninskaya Burial 2. In the oval pit, one of the long walls was slightly trimmed to the bottom. This niche barely contained the torso of a flexed skeleton, oriented with its head to the west. Two blades 10 cm and 7 cm long were found near the skull [1, p. 39, fig. 40].

Peregruznoe Kurgan 10, Burial 7. The shape of the grave pit was not observed. In one of its walls there was a niche (?), in which a “package” of long bones of an adult was revealed. Two blades were found in the burial, one of which was broken. In addition, sections of blades were uncovered there, likely being parts of a composite blade [1, pp. 36, 37, fig. 36].

Sharakhalsun-3 Kurgan 5, Burial 8. “The burial structure is being reconstructed as an undercut” [1, p. 31]. No human bones were found in the sub-triangular niche observed along one of the long walls. They were revealed in the main part of the pit. A blade with straight ends lay against the right elbow. Its edges are retouched, the length of the blade is 6.4 cm [1, p. 31, fig. 29, 3,4].

Konstantinovskiy I Kurgan 1, Burial 8. The assumption that the entrance pit adjoined the chamber in which the human skeleton was located from the south, the bottom of which was 6-7 cm below the bottom of the chamber, needs explanation. The walls of these pits are vertical. In the drawing, the outline of the northern pit was marked with a dotted line, as if it was a camera. It was noted that along the southern border of the chamber, three small limestones were uncovered from the filling. The walls of both pits adjoined, but their stratigraphic sequence is unclear.

A woman was buried in a rectangular pit. The deceased was buried crouched on her back, her legs were lying on her right side, her head was oriented to the SE. A trepanation hole was observed on the skull, the hands rested in the groin area. A blade with an obliquely broken distal end 7.6 cm long was found between the palms. At the feet was an obsidian scraper and a stone pest. A vessel lay next to the head [10, pp. 161, 162, fig. 13, 14].

In addition to the “undercuts”, catacombs were on the list of extraordinary cases [29]. In the *Mukhin II burial ground in Kurgan 5*, two catacombs of the same type were discovered (Burials 9 and 30), in which the subquadrangle shaft had a stepped entrance to a trapezoidal chamber connected along one axis with the well. The entrance pit to the chamber was blocked with flagstones. Burial 9 contained a skeleton of a woman, and Burial 30 – of a man. The bones were dyed with red paint. The waist of the female skeleton was girded with a ribbon of round beads cut from river shells strung on a cord; two knife-shaped blades of flint (length – 16 cm) and obsidian (length – 25 cm) were found in the groin area. In addition, a thin flint bladelet 4 cm long was found in the head area. In the male burial, the half-bent right hand rested on the groin, and the left hand, sharply bent at the elbow, rested at the shoulder. The male skeleton lay on a slatted frame and was covered with planks [30, pp. 41, 42, 47, 48. fig. 28, 2, 29, 4-10, 35, 3, 4]. The deceased might have lay in a wooden box, which was a “symbolic cart”.

The Mukhin obsidian blade is sometimes called a large dagger (length – 24.5 cm). Obsidian is close to Transcaucasian samples (Lake Van region), but differs from them in the refractive index (the definition was made by volcanologist V.V. Nasedkin).

The walls of a burial could not always be observed from the level of its construction. But in some cases, there was a ledge on adjacent walls, or along its perimeter. The overlap of the burial rested on it. The emergence of chamber burial structures suggests a more complex design. We can assume that the idea of a catacomb was convergent [31, p. 246]. In Eastern Europe, the catacomb grave pit was a complex structure. It emerged as a result of the development of funeral rites among cattle breeders, who used wheeled transport in their daily life. The catacomb was probably the embodiment of a “symbolic cart” necessary for “traveling” in another world, to which the souls of the deceased went.

In the Moldavian burial ground of Giurgiulești, catacombs with depressions cut into the floor of the chamber were discovered, in which the remains of children were found. A flat square box with the remains of a flexed man and a bronze awl was found at the bottom of the chamber in the basin of the Lower Don in Mukhinsky Kurgan 5 in a corridor-type catacomb (Burial 30). Typologically, the structure is similar to the neighboring catacomb 9 [30, Fig. 35, 3]. For Giurgiulești, the date of Burial 3 is 4459-4437 BC [1, Tables 3, 1]. There are no absolute dates for the Mukhin burials.

R.G. Magomedov believes that it is impossible to exclude the convergent origin of the catacomb form of the burial structure in the early Bronze Age. “One of the arguments of polycentrism in the emergence of catacombs is their construction in the manner of existing dwellings, as well as such vehicles of nomads as kubitki-carts” [31, p. 101]. Early catacombs are known in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. In the steppe world, the dwelling was a wagon, which in the funerary world was transformed into a catacomb-type funerary structure [32].

One of the most striking sites of the second half of the V millennium BC is the burial ground near the city of Varna. Graves with “masks” made of unburned clay, decorated with details of gold, were discovered there. In one of the prestigious Burials 43, two flint blades were found along the right thigh: a wide one, oriented with the distal end to the knee with a length of 40 cm, and a narrow one with a length of 20 cm. A third blade 10 cm long was also found there, with its distal end broken. A golden cap of a truncated-conical shape with a through hole was found between the femurs, near the groin. Its height is about 7 cm. In this burial, there was clearly a golden case for a phallus between the thighs of the buried.

According to M. Gimbutas, in the V millennium BC, the transition to a patriarchal society began in Europe. With the dominance of the masculinity in the tribal society, a special attention was paid to the reproductive organ. The phallic cult in the form of a fertilizing bull became widespread among the Indo-European peoples. To preserve sexual energy, they resorted to the protection of the phallus. For this purpose, various devices in the form of special cylinders or cones were used. The golden case for the phallus, discovered in the Varna burial ground, might have belonged to such devices. Among the peoples of the southern seas, such a phallus case made of dried lagenaria fruit, or a special pouch decorated with zigzag ribbons, was called *koteka* or *holim*. It was traditionally worn by men in New Guinea.

During this period of development of the tribal society, patriarchal relations were formed, in which power and social privileges belonged to men. Under the dominance of the institution of male power, special rituals were formed in some societies. During the initiations, sacrifices were made, one of which was ritual circumcision – the removal of the

boys' foreskin. The history of these manipulations encounters several millennia. Documentary evidence of the circumcision rite is found on the reliefs of the tombs of the Ancient Kingdom in Egypt (second half of the III Millennium BC). This religious rite is observed in the tomb of the Vizier Ankhmakhor in Saqqara. For such operations, a flint blade was necessarily used. In the Holy Scriptures of Christians, touching the hips or groin with a stone knife was a ritual gesture of symbolic circumcision of the foreskin [33]. The circumcision was performed by men, in rare cases by women. In order to prevent the death of her son, "Zipporah, taking a stone knife, cut off her son's foreskin and, throwing it at his feet, said: Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me⁷." The use of a stone tool for the ceremony can be regarded as a sign of the great antiquity of this sacred action. In a prestigious burial from Giurgiulești, a 15 cm horn blade with a sharp end oriented to the feet was discovered in the groin area. It imitated a flint knife-shaped blade. According to B. Govedaritsa, it was a polished symbolic phallus [34, fig. 12].

The tradition of circumcision in the North Caucasus, associated with the rite of initiation, changing the status of a child, originated before the adoption of Islam. Its origins are lost in ancient times [35]. The rite of initiation might have concerned not only men, but also women in the Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age.

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7. The Bible. Exodus. 4. 24.

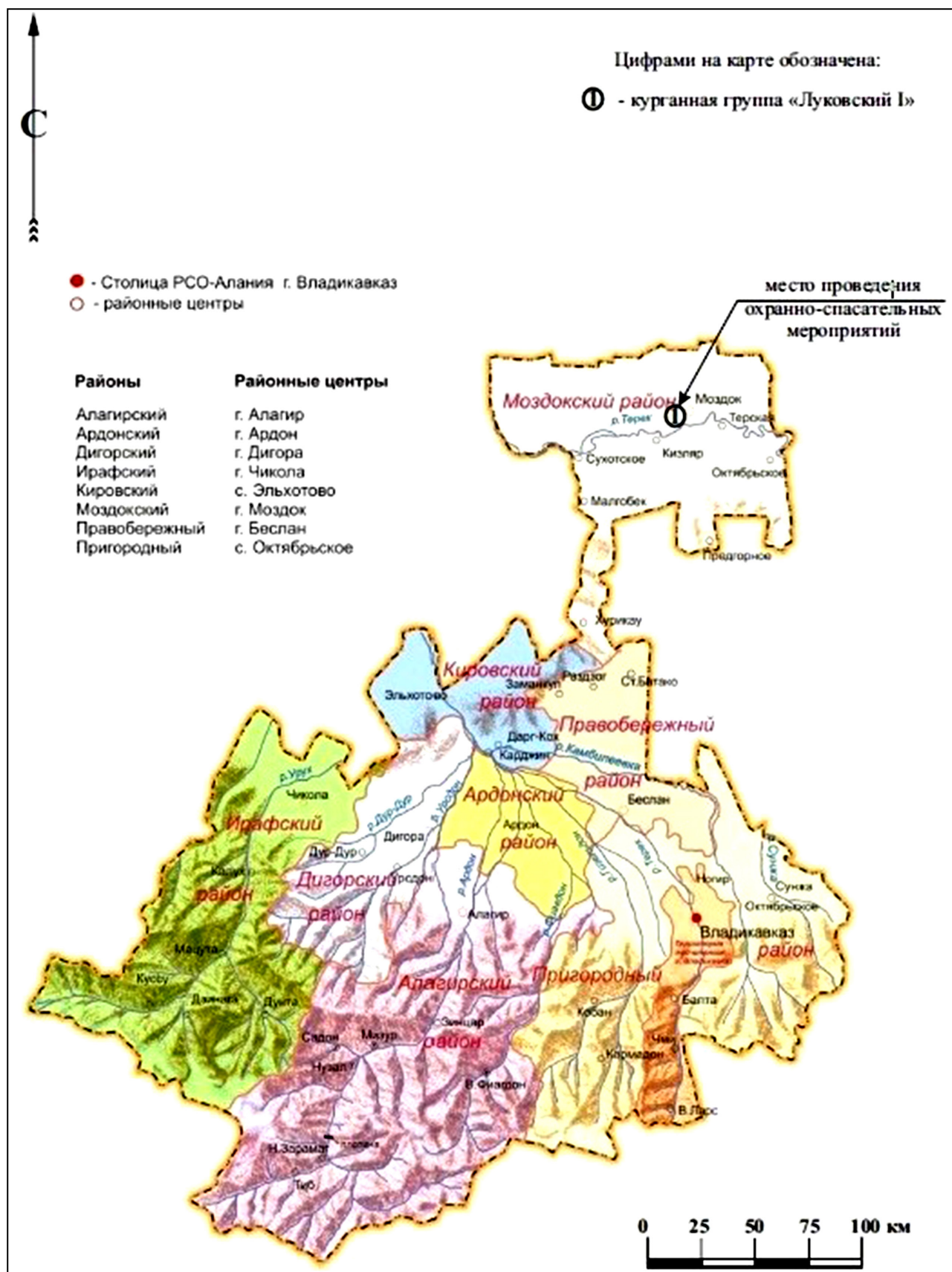


Fig. 1. Exploration area in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania

Рис. 1. Район исследований в Республике Северная Осетия – Алания



Fig. 2. Kurgan complex near Lukovskaya station

Рис. 2. Курганные группы у ст. Луковской

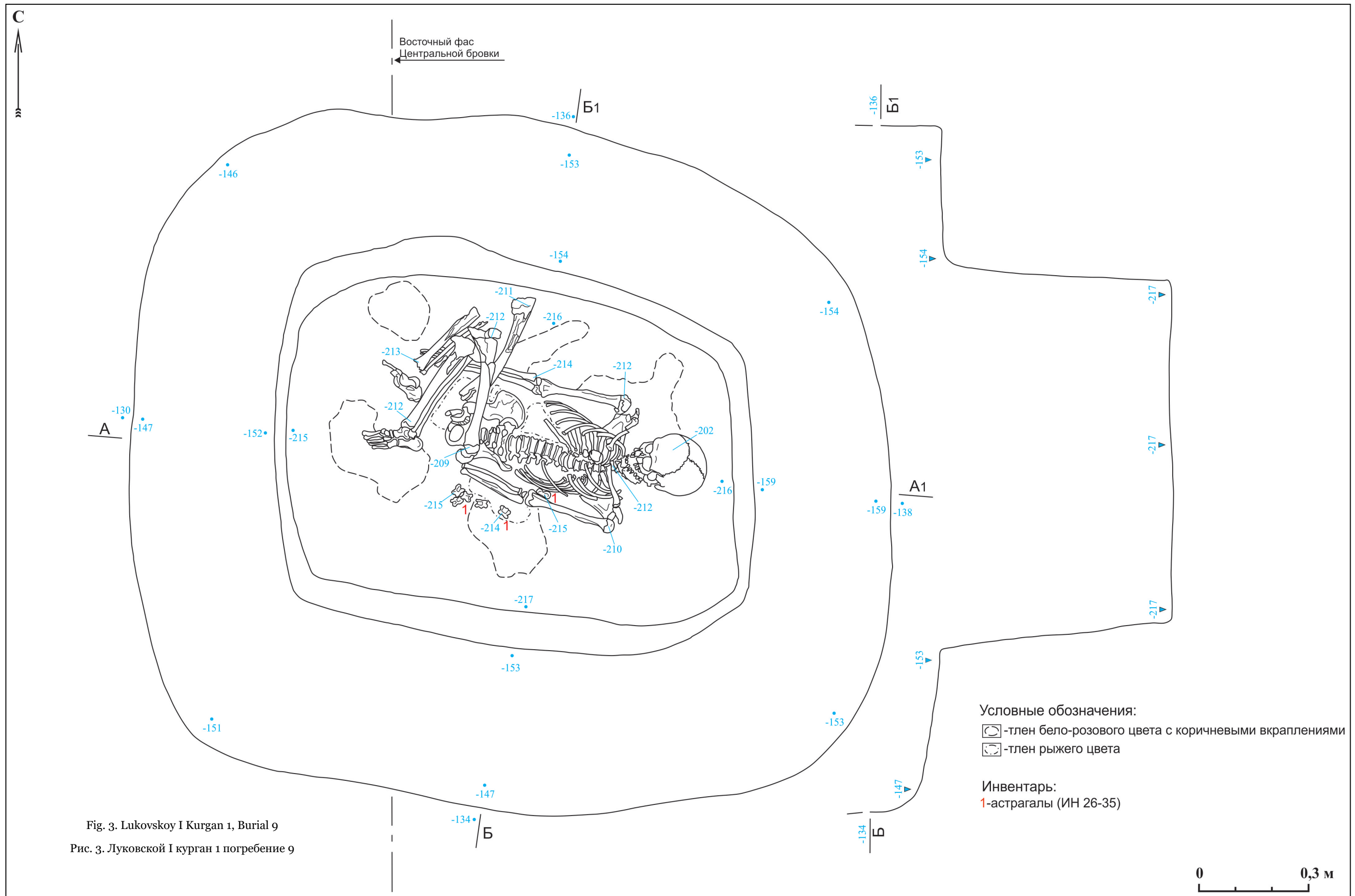


Fig. 3. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 9
 Рис. 3. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 9



Fig. 4. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 9. View from the south

Рис. 4. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 9. Вид с Ю



Fig. 5. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 9. View from the west

Рис. 5. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 9. Вид с з

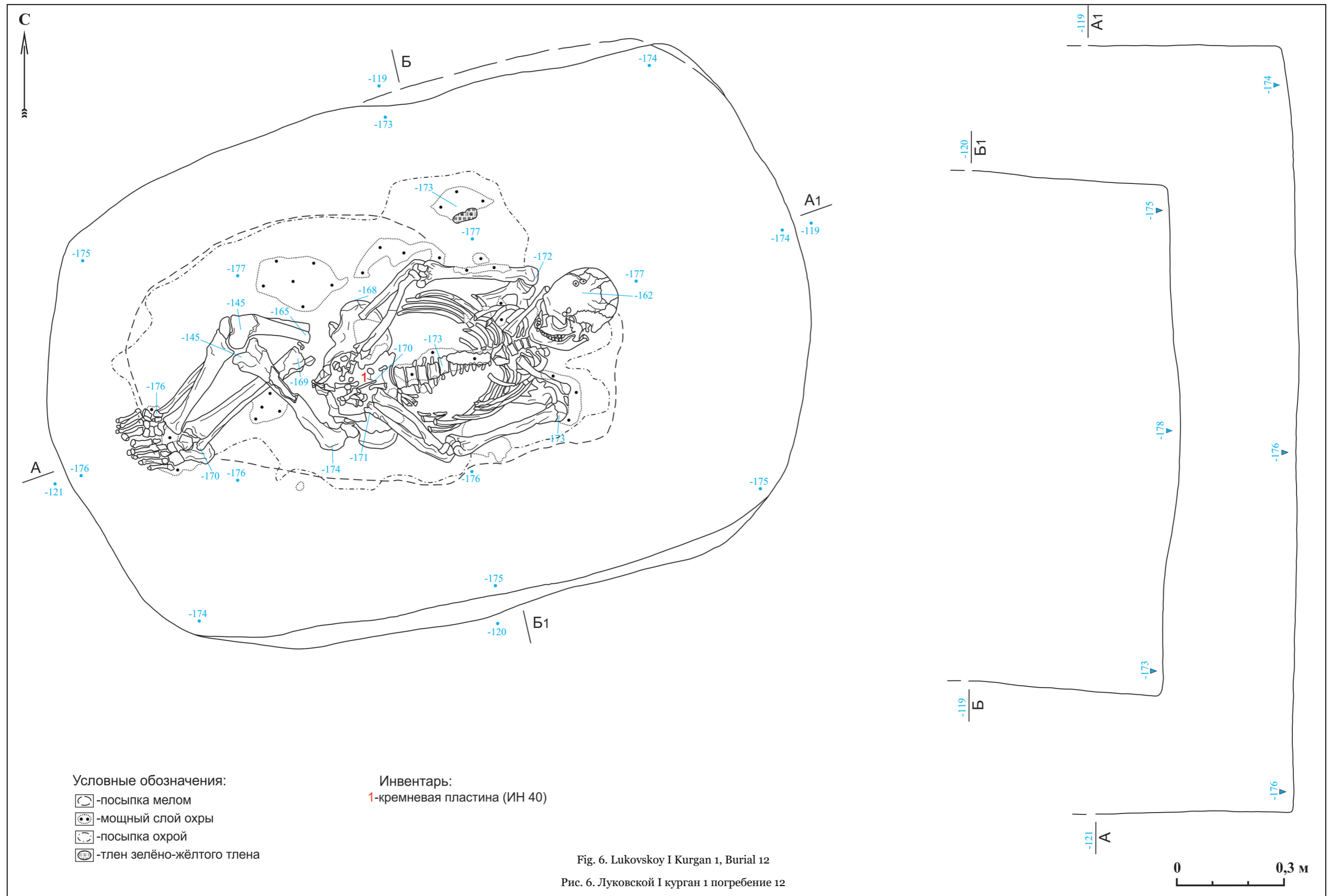




Fig. 7. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 12. View

Рис. 7. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 12. Вид с Ю



Fig. 8. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 12. Knife-shaped blade in the groin area

Рис. 8. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 12. Ножевидная пластина в области паха

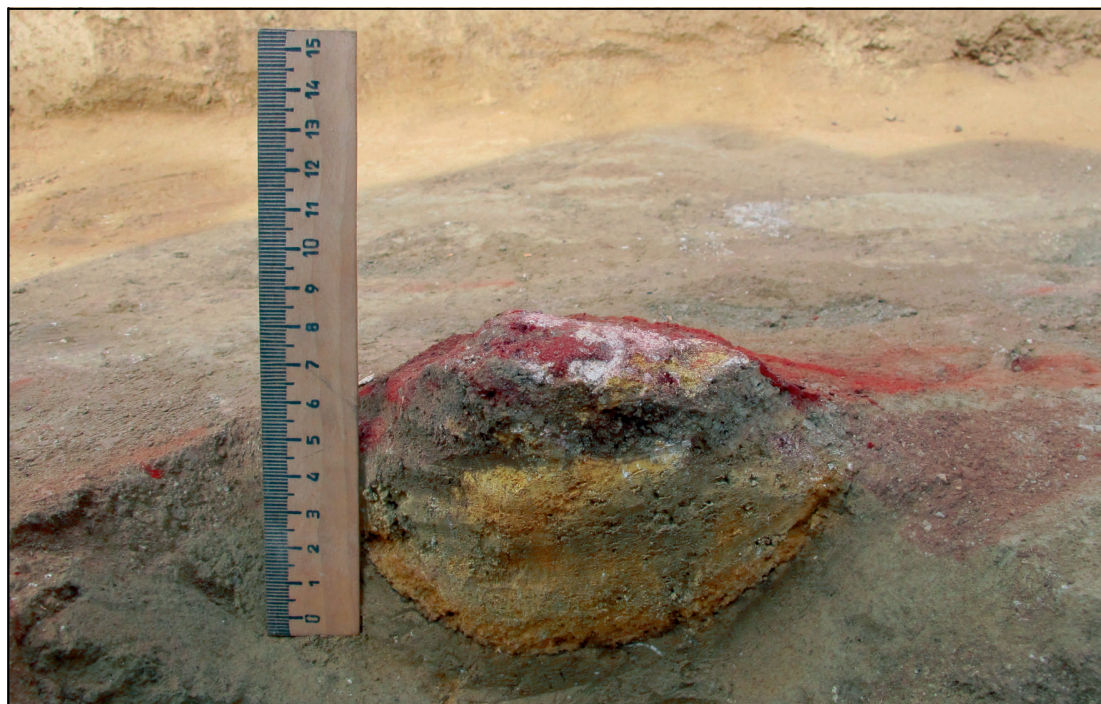


Fig. 9. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 12. Egg-shaped object
Рис. 9. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 12. Яйцевидный предмет



Fig. 10. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 12. Craniotomy
Рис. 10. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 12. Трепанация черепа

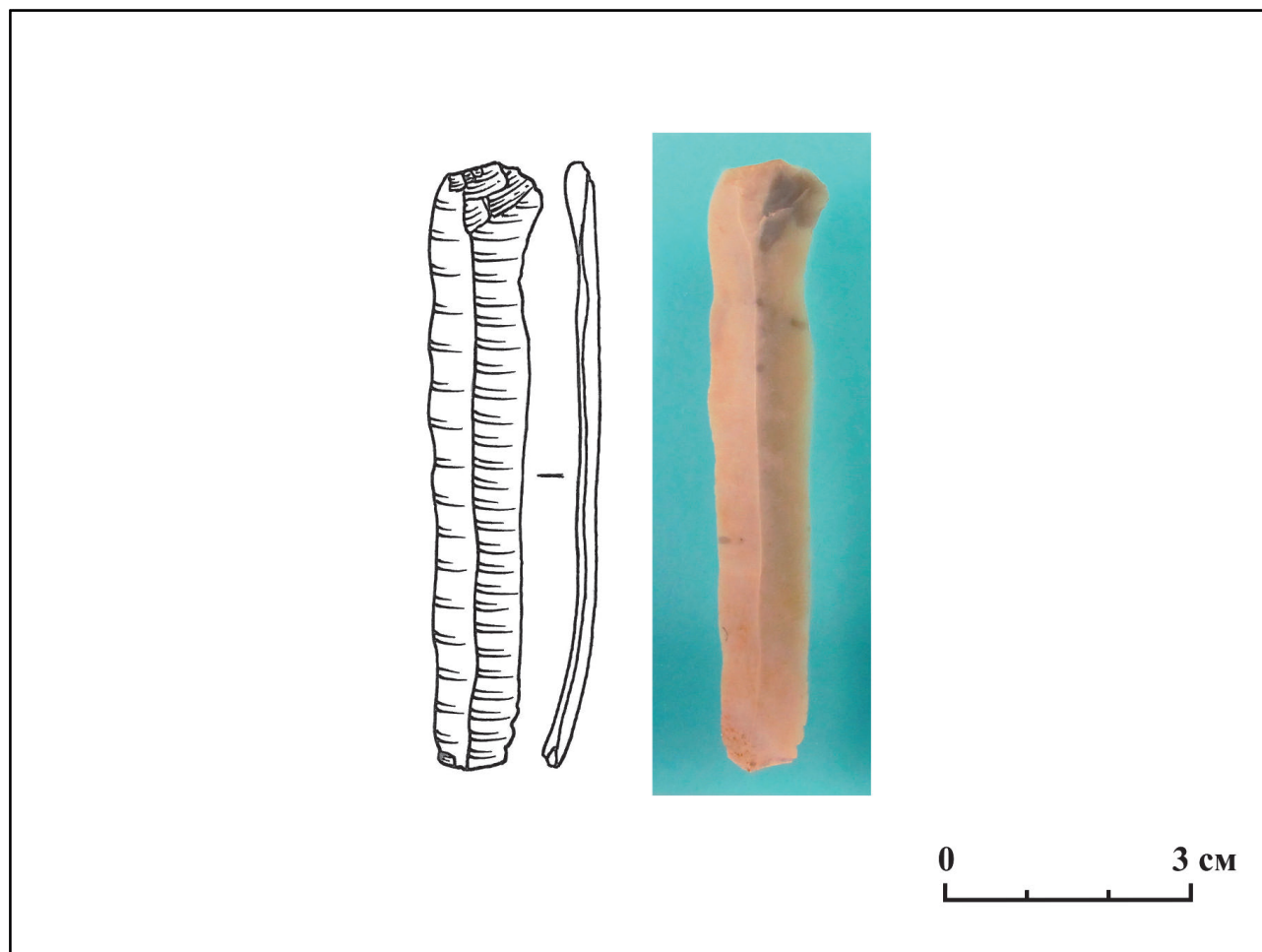


Fig. 11. Lukovskoy I Kurgan 1, Burial 12. Knife-shaped blad

Рис. 11. Луковской I курган 1 погребение 12. Ножевидная пластина

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