

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH1941031-1055>

Research paper

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## BURIALS OF THE EARLY MIDDLE BRONZE AGE MOUND I OF THE GUDERMES MOUNDS I

*Abstract.* The excavation in 2017 of the burial Mound I of the Gudermes mounds I revealed three distinct burial groups from different time periods, the oldest of which is associated with the Maikop culture. Our paper primarily focuses on intrusive burials from the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age, encompassing two subgroups with distinct funerary rituals. The skeletons in the first subgroup (Burials 9, 10, 13, and possibly 3) were laid in a semi-flexed position on the left side, with the head oriented to the ENE. Burial 3, situated in the mound's center, was constructed in a rectangular pit with walls lined using a mosaic of irregular stones and cobblestones. The grave was covered with logs, topped by a layer of river pebbles. Surrounding this central burial were three contemporaneous burials of a man, a woman, and a child. The accompanying grave goods comprised a stone axe, a bronze dagger-knife, and six bone hammer-head pins. Another subgroup comprises two supine burials wherein skeletons were laid on their backs, with their heads facing the SSE. Based on stratigraphic data, these burials are relatively recent. In terms of funerary ritual and inventory details, they align with the initial period of the Middle Bronze Age and are similar to the first group. The inventory includes fragments of vessels, a bronze trapezoidal pendant, a pierced bronze spiral piece, and a fragment of a bronze object (possibly a bead), along with glass beads. Examination of funerary rituals and inventory facilitates the identification of parallels with Middle Bronze Age sites of Chechnya, Ingushetia, the Central Caucasus, and the Kuban region, allowing us to attribute the early burials of Mound I at the Gudermes mounds I to the North Caucasian culture.

*Keywords:* Chechen Republic; Gudermes mounds I; Early and Middle Bronze age; culture; burial mound; burial; ritual; inventory; ceramics; adornment

**For citation:** Malashev V.Yu., Ataev G.D., Saipudinov M.Sh. Burials of the Early Middle Bronze Age Mound I of the Gudermes Mounds I. *History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus*. 2023. Vol. 19. N.4. P. 1031-1055. [doi.org/10.32653/CH1941031-1055](https://doi.org/10.32653/CH1941031-1055)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/СН1941031-1055>

Исследовательская статья

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## ПОГРЕБЕНИЯ РАННЕГО ЭТАПА СРЕДНЕГО БРОНЗОВОГО ВЕКА КУРГАНА 1 МОГИЛЬНИКА ГУДЕРМЕССКИЕ КУРГАНЫ №1

*Аннотация.* Статья посвящена захоронениям начального периода среднего бронзового века кургана 1 могильника Гудермесские курганы №1, раскопанного в 2017 г., где были обнаружены три разновременные группы захоронений. Наиболее древнее погребение относится к майкопской культуре. Основная группа – впускные погребения раннего этапа среднего бронзового века, а внутри ее выделяются две одновременные подгруппы впускных захоронений, не схожие друг с другом по обряду. Первая (погребения 9, 10, 13 и, видимо, погребение 3) – с костяками в слабо скорченном положении на левом боку головой на ВСВ. Погребение 3 располагалось в центре кургана и совершено в прямоугольной яме. Стенки обложены кладкой из рванного камня и валунов. Могила перекрывалась бревнами, поверх которых сделана наброска из речной гальки. Вокруг него совершены три одновременных захоронения – мужчины, женщины и ребенка. Эти костяки находились в слабо скорченном положении на левом боку и лежали головой на ВСВ. Инвентарь, выявленный в них – каменный топорик, нож-кинжал из бронзы, шесть молоточковидных булавок из кости. К другой подгруппе относятся два погребения, в которых найдены скелеты, располагавшиеся вытянуто на спине головой на ЮЮВ. Исходя из данных стратиграфии, они относительно более поздние. По деталям обряда, а также инвентарю, они относятся к начальному периоду среднего бронзового века и близки к первой группе. Инвентарь: фрагменты сосудов, бронзовая фигурная подвеска трапециевидной формы, бронзовая спиралевидная пронизь и фрагмент бронзового предмета (бусина?), бусы из стекла. Изучение погребального обряда и инвентаря дает возможность обнаружить параллели в обряде и инвентаре памятников среднего бронзового века Северо-Восточного (Чечни и Ингушетии) и Центрального Кавказа, Прикубанья, что позволяет отнести погребения раннего этапа среднего бронзового века кургана 1 Гудермесские курганы №1 к северокавказской культуре.

*Ключевые слова:* Чеченская Республика; Гудермесские 1-е курганы; ранний и средний бронзовый век; обряд; оружие; керамика; украшения

**Для цитирования:** Малашев В.Ю., Атаев Г.Д., Сайпудинов М.Ш. Погребения раннего этапа среднего бронзового века кургана 1 могильника Гудермесские курганы № 1 // История, археология и этнография Кавказа. 2023. Т. 19. № 4. С. 1031-1055. doi.org/10.32653/СН1941031-1055

## Introduction

In 2017, a joint archaeological expedition conducted by the Institute of Archaeology of the RAS and the Center for Archaeological Research of the Institute of Humanitarian Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic excavated Mound I at the Gudermes mounds I, situated 2,5 km WSW from the city of Gudermes (Fig. 1). Nineteen burials and several complexes within the mound, indicative of the Bronze Age, were examined, including the stone wall of the main burial associated with the Maikop culture. The burials and complexes within the mound were categorized into three distinct cultural and chronological groups [1, p. 53–55]. The earliest among them is Burial 18, which dates back to the Novosvobodnaya stage of the Maikop culture.

The main burial group comprises intrusive burials from the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age, with a total of six examined burials (Nos. 2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 17). Two contemporaneous subgroups of intrusive burials have been distinguished, each exhibiting distinct funerary rites. The first subgroup comprising Burials 9, 10, and 13, with the conventional inclusion of Burial 3, - with the skeletons laid in the semi-flex position on the left side with their heads oriented to ENE; the second subgroup, Burials 2 and 17, feature skeletons lying in a supine position, with heads oriented to the SSE (Fig. 1). Despite being relatively late in time based on stratigraphic evidence, the details of the funerary ritual and inventory suggest that they belong to the initial period of the Middle Bronze Age and are close to the first group. In this article, we publish materials from burials of the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age Mound I of the Gudermes mounds I, provide their analysis, dating and cultural-historical interpretation.

## Materials

**Burial 2** is identified as an intrusive burial situated in the central part of the mound, positioned 2.7 m southwest from the center. It is contained within a rectangular pit with rounded corners, aligned along the NNW-SSE line (Fig. 2, 2), measuring 0.6 m in width and 1.3 m in length. The walls of the pit are vertical and reach up to 10 cm in height. The bottom is uneven. A poorly preserved skeleton, found inside, indicates an adult woman. The tibia bones and right femur were absent. The positioning of the skeleton suggests that the individual was laid out in a supine position, with the head oriented to the SSE. The arms were supine alongside the body, and the legs aligned with the axis of the body.

*Grave goods.* At the neck of the interred, six cylindrical glass beads made of opaque glass were discovered, each measuring 0.7×0.3–0.4 cm (Fig. 2, 3). Lying under the right knee joint was a fragment of a vessel rim with a slight outward bend and a short neck flattened at the top. The outer surface of the rim is smooth, with an uneven firing of a gray-orange color. The height of the rim from the neck is 1.5 cm (Fig. 2, 4).

**Burial 3** is identified as an intrusive burial located at the center of the mound; the burial was looted. Within the looter's pit fill, river cobblestones were discovered, arranged in 1-3 layers that collapsed inward along the perimeter of the pit, particularly on the north, west, and northeast sides. These pebble stones were originally part of the wooden cover of the pit,

forming a rounded space measuring 5.3×5 m along the outer contour, decreasing towards the southern part. Large stones were interspersed among the cobblestones in the central part (Fig. 1; 3, 1-3). The fill contained human bones, wood decay, and fragments of two hand-made vessels. The looter's pit disrupted the upper section of the wall contour.

The burial pit is wide and rectangular, with rounded corners, measuring 3.6×3.1 m from the bottom and is orientated with the long axis along the W-E line. The walls are inclined, tapering towards the bottom. Throughout the entire height of the pit walls, there is a lining of underworked stones, comprising limestone and red-brown shale, interspersed with river pebble stones. The dimensions of the limestone and slate layers range from 30×30×12 to 50×40×15 cm, while the pebbles measure from 30×15 to 30×30 cm. The masonry is irregular and lacks a systematic pattern. The positioning of stones on the upper level has been disturbed due to looting. However, the lower 1–2 rows, maintaining a configuration close to the original, delineate the contour line of a rectangular burial chamber with dimensions of 2.8×2.6 m, oriented along the W-E line (Fig. 1; 3, 2). The bottom is flat, horizontal.

The double burial revealed the remains of a man (aged 35–55 years) and a woman (aged 18–25 years). Due to the looting, their original positions and orientations could not be reconstructed. The construction of the burial structure was as follows: a wide rectangular pit with walls reaching the full height, lined with stones in an irregular pattern. At the upper level, there existed a wooden ceiling, atop which a filling of river pebbles was laying, extending beyond the confines of the pit.

#### *Grave goods.*

1. Fragments of a hand-made vessel. The vessel is large, with thick walls. The rim is bent outward, the edge is emphasized outside and rounded. On the outer surface of the vessel fragments, which are gray-yellow with gray amorphous spots, traces of smoothing are evident in the form of multidirectional, faintly discernible grooved comb-like stripes. The inner surface is gray-orange with amorphous gray-black spots, displaying clear traces of smoothing, similar to those on the outer surface. In fracture, the shard appears gray. The wall thickness varies between 0.7 and 1.3 cm (Fig. 4, 3).

2. Fragments of a hand-made vessel. The vessel is large, with thick walls. The rim is bent outward, the edge is emphasized outside and pointed. The outer surface of the fragments is gray-yellow, occasionally transitioning to gray-orange with gray amorphous spots, smoothed; the inner surface is similar. In fracture, the shard appears gray. The thickness of the shard ranges from 0.6 to 0.9 cm (Fig. 4, 1).

3. Fragments of a hand-made vessel from the looter's pit. Four pieces, likely originating from a single vessel, feature comb-like grooves on the outer surface and are formed from gray clay. The thickness of the shards measures up to 0.8 cm (Fig. 4, 2). Other fragments, presumed to belong to different vessels, showcase a gray-orange outer surface and a gray inner surface. The thickness of these shards ranges from 0.5 to 1.0 cm.

**Burial 9** is identified as an intrusive burial located in the central part, situated 4 m SSE from the center. The burial pit exhibits slightly rounded corners, resembling a trapezoid with a widened WSW part, measuring 3.1×1.75–1.4 m, and is oriented along the WSW-ENE line (Fig. 1; 5, 1). The walls are vertical, reaching up to 30 cm in height, and the bottom is lined with medium-sized stones, including limestone and slate. The stone lining is better preserved at the WSW wall, where the stones are arranged in three rows. The bottom is flat, sloping towards the WSW wall. Within the filling and at the bottom, between the ENE wall and the skull, evidence of wood decay from the ceiling boards was observed.

The skeleton of a man aged 55 years or older was uncovered, lying in a flexed position on the left side, with the head oriented to the ENE. The bones of the body had collapsed onto the back. The right arm overlapped the left and was bent at the elbow joint at a right angle, with the hand positioned opposite the abdomen. The left arm was supine along the body, with the hand located near the right knee. The angle in the hip joint of the right leg is straight, while in the left leg, it is obtuse. In the knee joints, the angle is acute. The feet are slightly pulled towards the pelvis (Fig. 5, 1). Beneath the interred man, a layer of organic decay, characterized by a dark brown color and likely of plant origin (bark, reeds?), was discovered.

*Grave goods.* Found near the left shoulder, opposite the chest, was a socketed stone axe with a hammer-shaped butt, with the butt facing the interred. The blade of the axe is curved, the working edge is rounded (Fig. 6, 2). The axe is made from light gray stone with dark speckled inclusions and veining; the surface exhibits thorough polishing. The length of the axe along the longitudinal axis is 14 cm (Fig. 6, 1). The blade is triangular in plan, widening toward the socket, and in side profile, it expands towards the working edge, displaying a multifaceted cross-section with 10 edges. The middle edges on the sides are weakly expressed, particularly at the socket. A longitudinal protrusion (0.7 cm wide and up to 0.2 cm high), simulating a casting seam, is present on the upper edge of the blade. The blade's length is 9–10 cm, and the working edge measures 6.5 cm in height. The socket hole is round in plan and cone-shaped in section, created through one-sided drilling from the upper plane. The diameter of the upper hole is 2.0 cm, and the lower one is 1.7 cm. The transition from the socket to butt is distinctly marked by a vertical ledge up to 0.3 cm high. The butt is truncated-conical, tapering to a terminal at the end, and oval in cross-section. Dimensions at the socket are 4.5×3.5 cm, and at the terminal – 2.7×2.5 cm. The terminal is disc-shaped, with a diameter of 3.0 cm and a thickness of 0.3 cm. The transition from the body of the butt to the terminal is smooth. The length of the butt with the terminal ranges from 4.5 cm on the lower side to 5.5 cm on the upper side. On the underside of the butt and its terminal, there is a longitudinal split, polished in ancient times, resulting from use.

Between the left elbow and the chest of the interred, with its tip towards the head, lay a bronze knife (Fig. 6, 2). This knife-dagger is made of bronze, featuring a double-edged blade with a foliate point, sloping shoulders, and a subrectangular tang (Fig. 6, 2). The knife has a total length of 18.5 cm, with a blade length of 14.0 cm and a tang length of 4.5 cm. The cross-section of the blade is flat, with a thickness of about 0.3–0.4 cm. The maximum width of the blade (4 cm) is at its tip quarter. The width of the handle at the shoulders is 2.5 cm, narrowing to 1.3 cm in the middle and widening to 1.5 cm at the top edge. The maximum thickness of the tang is 0.4 cm. The knife originally had a wooden handle, as evidenced by preserved oxides and a straight edge at the shoulders of the blade. Additionally, within the pit fill, near the stones in the southeast corner, a fragment of a vessel wall was discovered. The outer surface is coated with gray-orange clay, while the inner surface is gray. The fragment measures 4.0×3.5 cm, and the thickness of the shard is 0.5 cm (Fig. 5, 3).

**Burial 10** is identified as an intrusive burial located in the central part of the mound, positioned 5 m SW from the center. The burial pit has a rectangular shape oriented along the WSW-NE line, with dimensions measuring 1.9×1.6 m. The contour of the pit is disrupted in the southern and western parts. The walls are vertical, reaching up to 20 cm in height (Fig. 7, 1–2). The bottom is flat, sloping towards the WSW wall. The pit was filled with wood decay, ranging from 1 to 8 cm in thickness, originating from the ceiling boards that were laid perpendicular to the long axis of the pit, along with stones that were placed at the bottom.

The skeleton of a child, aged 7–10 years, was discovered in a flexed position on the left side, with the head oriented to the ENE. The bones of the body had collapsed onto the chest. The left arm is supine away from the body, with the hand lying near the right knee. The right arm is bent at the elbow joint at a right angle, and the hand lies next to the left knee. The angle in the hip joint of the right leg is obtuse, while in the knee joint, it is acute. In the left leg, the angle in the hip joint is straight, and in the knee joint, it is acute. The feet are brought together and moved towards the pelvis. Dark brown organic decay was found at the bottom (Fig. 7, 2).

*Grave goods.* An object made of animal bone measuring  $2.5 \times 0.8 \times 0.3$  cm was found between the skull and the NNW wall (Fig. 7, 3).

**Burial 13** is identified as an intrusive burial, situated in the northern part of the mound, 7 m to the NNW from the center. The pit is rectangular, oriented along the W-E line, measuring  $2.3 \times 1.85$  m. The northwestern part of the burial has been disrupted by a looter's pit. The walls are vertical, reaching up to 10 cm in height (Fig. 1). The walls of the pit are lined with stones, comprising limestone and red-brown slate, defining an internal space of  $1.7 \times 1.2$  m. The bottom is flat, sloping towards the western wall. Stones are present in the filling, likely originating from the ceiling (Fig. 8, 1).

The skeleton of the interred woman suffered damage due to the excavation of the looter's pit, with only bones of the upper torso and arms being recovered. Based on their position, it is evident that the woman, of approximately 18 years old, was lying in a flexed position on her left side with her head to the east. The left arm was supine and set back from the body, while the right arm was bent at the elbow joint at a right angle. It was impossible to determine the location of the legs. Notably, the left humerus and ribs are painted with ocher (Fig. 8, 2).

*Grave goods.* The majority of the grave goods, including bone pins Nos. 1–4, 6, and a piece of ocher No. 7, are concentrated opposite the chest of the interred. One of the pins, No. 5, was positioned on the chest bones. Pins Nos. 3, 4, and 6 were laid with their points towards the head of the interred, while pins Nos. 2 and 5 were placed with their points at the feet. Pin No. 1 was oriented with its point towards the southern wall. All the pins are made from bird bones (Fig. 8, 2).

1. A fragment of *pin No. 1* is made from bone. A cylindrical pin shaft, with a pointed end, without a head, measuring 5.0 cm in length, with a maximum diameter of 0.3 cm, has been preserved (Fig. 9, 1).

2. *Pin No. 2* – hammer-shaped, made from bone. The shaft is cylindrical, with a pointed end. The head is hammer-shaped, consisting of two rounded finials ( $d=0.5$  cm), positioned on small “legs” ( $0.3 \times 0.2$  cm) on a subtriangular extension of the shaft with a hole in the middle. Pin dimensions: length – 7.4 cm, shaft length – 6.5 cm, maximum shaft diameter – 0.5 cm, head height – 0.7 cm, head width – 1.7 cm, hole diameter – 0.2–0.3 cm (Fig. 9, 2).

3. *Pin No. 3* – hammer-shaped, made from bone. The shaft is cylindrical, with a pointed end. The head is hammer-shaped, consisting of two hemispherical finials ( $0.5 \times 0.9$  cm), positioned on small “legs” ( $0.5 \times 0.3$  cm) on a subtriangular extension of the shaft with a hole in the middle. Pin dimensions: length – 7.5 cm, shaft length – 6.4 cm, maximum shaft diameter – 0.5 cm, head height – 1.1 cm, head width – 2.5 cm, and hole diameter – 0.3 cm (Fig. 9, 3).

4. *Pin No. 4* – hammer-shaped, made from bone. The shaft is cylindrical, with a pointed end. The head is hammer-shaped, consisting of two rounded finials ( $0.4 \times 0.5$  cm), posi-

tioned on a subtriangular extension of the shaft with a hole in the middle. Pin dimensions: length – 7.4 cm, shaft length – 6.5 cm, maximum shaft diameter – 0.4 cm, head height – 0.9 cm, head width – 1.6 cm, and hole diameter – 0.2–0.3 cm (Fig. 9, 4).

5. *Pin No. 5* – hammer-shaped, made from bone. The shaft is cylindrical, with a pointed end. The head is hammer-shaped, consisting of two rounded finials (0.5×0.6 cm), which are symmetrically positioned on the extension of the shaft with a hole in the middle. Pin dimensions: length – 8.2 cm, shaft length – 7.5 cm, maximum shaft diameter – 0.5 cm, head height – 0.7 cm, head width – 2.0 cm, and hole diameter – 0.2–0.3 cm (Fig. 9, 5).

6. *Pin No. 6* – hammer-shaped, made from bone. The shaft is cylindrical, with a pointed end. The head is hammer-shaped, consisting of two rounded finials (0.5×0.6 cm), symmetrically positioned on the extension of the shaft with a hole in the middle. Pin dimensions: length – 5.9 cm, shaft length – 5.1 cm, maximum shaft diameter – 0.5 cm, head height – 0.7–0.8 cm, head width – 1.5 cm, and hole diameter – 0.2–0.3 cm (Fig. 9, 6). Additionally, a piece of mineral paint (possibly, ocher), irregular in shape with clearly visible worn edges, measuring 2.0×1.6×1.7 cm, was found (Fig. 9, 7).

**Burial 17** is identified as an intrusive burial, located in the SW sector of the mound, 13 m to the SW from the center. The burial, positioned 80–90 cm into the mound under stones, cut through the stone wall utilized for pit decoration. The SE part of the pit was partly collapsed (Fig. 1). The pit has an oval shape, oriented along the NW-SE line, with a width of 0.9 m and a length of 1.2 m. The walls are inclined, tapering towards a flat bottom.

Within the pit, the remains of a 5–7 year old child were found, lacking the skull and the bones of the right hand. Based on the bone arrangement, the interred child laid in a supine position, with the head to the SE. The left arm is supine along the body, and the legs rest along the body's axis, brought together at the tibia bones (Fig. 10, 1).

*Grave goods.* Between the left humerus and the chest, a bronze figured trapezoidal pendant was discovered. The outer surface of the pendant is adorned in the form of three rollers (Fig. 10, 2), featuring a loop on the narrow side. The dimensions of the pendant are 1.1×0.7 cm, and the loop measures 0.4×0.3×0.4 cm.

Additionally, near the pelvis and beneath it, a spiral-shaped bronze pierced piece was found (length – 0.6 cm, diameter – 0.3 cm (Fig. 10, 3)), along with a fragment of a bronze object (possibly a bead) of spherical shape, measuring 0.4×0.4 cm (Fig. 10, 4), and glass beads.

## Discussion

In Mound I of the Gudermes mounds I, a total of 19 burials from the early, middle, and late Bronze Age were identified, representing three distinct cultural and chronological groups. The present study considers the intrusive burials of the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age. The main burial of the Maikop culture was found to be subjected to looting.

Two contemporaneous subgroups of intrusive burials have been identified, exhibiting differences in funerary rituals. The first subgroup (Burials 9, 10, 13, and conventional Burial 3) contains semi-flexed burials with the skeletons lying on their side, with the heads oriented to ENE, while the second subgroup (Burials 2 and 17) features skeletons lying in a supine position with their heads oriented to the SSE (Fig. 1). Based on stratigraphy, the second subgroup is the earlier one, and judging by the details of the ritual and accompanying grave

goods, belongs to the early period of the Middle Bronze Age and share similarity with the first subgroup.

Burial 3 stands out as particularly interesting and structurally complex. In terms of both the number and composition of grave goods, Burials 9, 10, and 13 are considered the most noteworthy. Situated in the center of the mound, Burial 3 was built in a wide rectangular pit with rounded corners, aligned along the W-E line. The walls are inclined, tapering towards the bottom, and are adorned with masonry composed of stones and cobblestones. The masonry is irregular in form. The looting led to a disturbance in the position of the upper stones of the southern, eastern, and western walls. Notably, the top of the southern wall in the eastern part was broken by the pit of Burial 8. Despite this, the lower 1–2 rows have retained a configuration close to the original. Logs were placed atop the pit, and above them, and surrounding the pit, a mound of river pebbles was observed. In the vicinity of Burial 3, contemporaneous burials were identified (Burial 9 – of a man, Burial 13 – of a woman, and Burial 10 – of a child). In these burials, skeletons lay in a semi-flexed position on the left side, with their skulls oriented towards the ENE direction.

Six burials from the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age underwent thorough examination. Through the analysis of the mound burials, it was determined that they were interred in pits distinguished by variations in size and structure. Burials 3, 9, 10, 13 were made in wide rectangular pits with their long axis oriented along the West-East and WSW-ENE lines. Pits of Burials 2 and 17 are narrow, rectangular or oval in shape, with their long axis oriented along the NNW-SSE and NW-SE lines. The position and orientation of the interred correspond with these design features. In Burials 9, 10, 13, the interred lay flexed on their left side with their heads facing the eastern sector (East and ENE); Burial 3, a paired burial of a man and a woman, was looted; the position and orientation of the buried cannot be restored. In Burials 2 and 17, the interred were laid in the supine position with their heads oriented to the SSE and SE.

Several pits revealed evidence of wood decay from ceiling boards, notably in Burials 3, 9, and 10. In certain pits, thin layers of organic decay of plant origin, displaying a dark brown color were identified. In Burial 13 the left humerus and ribs were adorned with ocher. Additionally, a piece of mineral paint (ochre?) was discovered here.

The examination of burial structures and rituals unveils parallels with the sites from the initial period of the Middle Bronze Age in the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Ingushetia, particularly resembling the sites of the Central Caucasus and the Eastern Kuban region. This similarity allows for a closer association and attribution of the early burials in Mound I of Gudermes mounds I to the North Caucasian cultural and historical community (hereinafter CHC).

V.I. Markovin noted that across the territory from the Kuban region to Chechnya, burial sites are prevalent: “In the foothills and adjacent steppe areas, burial mounds with a significant number of stones are common, often surrounded by cromlechs. The burial pits beneath the mounds are also characterized by a substantial number of stones. This feature is observed throughout the entire distribution area of the North Caucasian culture. The burials are both flexed and supine, with southern and east-west latitudinal orientations” [2, p. 121, 122; 3, p. 257–283]. In essence, the burial structures and funerary rituals observed in Mound I of Gudermes mounds I share similarities with the rituals and structures of the North Caucasian CHC, facilitating their attribution to it.



In the analyzed burials from the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age, distinctive grave goods were unearthed: weaponry such as a stone axe and a knife-dagger blade, adornments such as hammer-shaped pins, a figurative pendant, a spiral pierced piece, a fragment of a bronze bead, glass beads, and ceramic artifacts.

In the embarkment of the southern part of the mound, fragments of a hand-made vessel. The vessel is flat-bottomed, the body is truncated-biconical, the rim is slightly bent outward, the upper edge is beveled outward. The short neck and the transition to the shoulder are highlighted, the maximum diameter is located in the upper third of the body. The surface of the vessel has traces of rough smoothing; gray in color. The firing is uneven, the shard in fracture appears black (Fig. 2, 1). Dimensions: vessel height – 12 cm, rim diameter – 13.5 cm, body diameter – about 15 cm, bottom diameter – 9 cm. The vessel found in the mound belongs to Type I pots according to V.I. Markovin. The ceramic assemblage comprises fragments of vessels. Their surfaces are predominantly smoothed, exhibiting hues of gray-orange or gray-yellow with gray amorphous spots and traces of distinctive relief comb-like stripes. Among the findings are three vessel rims (Fig. 2, 4; 4, 1, 3), with the first closely resembling vessels of Type III and the second and third identified as rims from Type I pots according to V.I. Markovin [3, p. 277–279, tab. 84]. Through the examination of surface treatment, color, and rims, these fragments exhibit similarities with ceramics from sites in the western regions of Chechnya and Ingushetia, the Central Caucasus, and the Eastern Kuban region. These analogies, observed in both funeral rites and ceramics, allow for their attribution to the North Caucasian CHC. Notably, no similarity or connection was discerned with contemporaneous sites in the mountainous regions of Eastern Chechnya and Dagestan, except for a fragment with traces of rough coating from Burial 9 (Fig. 5, 3).

The stone axe discovered in Burial 9, characterized by a hammer-shaped butt, a curved blade, and a rounded working edge (Fig. 6, 1), belongs to the Kabardino-Pyatigorsk type of axes, specifically the faceted type (Type I). According to V.I. Markovin's classification, axes of this type are considered typologically earlier than those of the smooth type (Type II). Markovin's proposed evolutionary sequence suggests a progression from simpler to more complex forms, categorized into three stages of the North Caucasian culture [4, p. 100, 101]. In this context, the early stage involves simple forms of axes, the middle stage comprises a significant number of smooth and faceted axes with curved profiles, and the late stage features weakly curved axes with elongated outlines of the Mikhailovsky type, derived from the smooth type [4, p. 100]. While axes of these types have been discovered in the North-Eastern Caucasus, we focus here on faceted axes.

In Dagestan they were found at the settlement of Gemetyube I [5, p. 145, 187, fig. 27, 43], in the village of Bazhigan, vicinity of Derbent [4, p. 48, 49, fig. 15, 13], accidental find [4, p. 48, 49, fig. 15, 12], in Chechnya near the city of Grozny [4, p. 48, 49, fig. 15, 39], in the Bamut burial grounds [6, p. 197, fig. 7, 2], in Galashki [7, p. 85–93, fig. 23, 11–12]. They were found in large numbers in the central part of the North Caucasus [4, p. 48, 99, fig. 9, 15, 18, 20–22; 13, 28, 29, 32–38, etc.; 3, p. 265, 270, 274, tab. 77, 12, 13, 19; 80, 53–57, 83, 56, etc.; 8, p. 118, 119, fig. 7 I; 7 III; 7 IV; 9, p. 22, fig. 8, III 1; 10, p. 93, fig. 3, 3; 11, p. 78, 79, fig. 30, 24, 25; 12, p. 138, 143, fig. 18, 8, 9; 13, p. 197, fig. 49, 1–9] and in smaller quantities in the Kuban region [14, p. 58, fig. 14, 1–3, 17, 4; 15, p. 14].

Their chronology has undergone changes. The technology for making smooth axes reached its peak in the II millennium BCE, according to V.I. Markovin [4, p. 100]. V.A. Safronov classifies axes into smooth and faceted based on the location of the drilled socket in

relation to the blade part. According to Safronov, the period of distribution of axes of the Kabardino-Pyatigorsk type falls within the 17th–13th centuries BCE [16, p. 103–113]. Other classifications by S.N. Korenevsky [17, p. 78–92] and A.A. Kleshchenko [18, p. 167–189] have also been proposed. Considering that smooth axes in Dagestan were found in settlements of the late Early Bronze Age, it becomes evident that the existing chronological scale may not be suitable. In Dagestan, these axes were discovered in Early Bronze Age settlements such as Tad-Shob, Verkhnyaya Sigitma, Gemetyube II, Mamaikutan [5, p. 145–149, 186–189, fig. 27, 36, 37; 34, 23; 36, 11]. These axes were found in sites dating from the late 4th and the first half of the III millennium BCE. This is evidenced by the finds of axes similar in shape to Dagestan ones in the early burials of the North Caucasian CHC of Ust-Dzhegutinsky burial ground. According to radiocarbon analysis, the age of these burials, along with the axes, dates to around  $2160 \pm 60$  years BCE for Burial 10 of Mound 32 and  $2060 \pm 60$  years BCE for Burial 1 of Mound 24 [14, p. 58, 59, fig. 21, 1, 2], and in Lebedi I burial ground of the Novotitarovskaya culture, dating back to the 25th–24th centuries BCE [19, p. 13–32]. These dates suggest that the emergence of these axes and the early period of the North Caucasian CHC may be more ancient than previously thought. V.I. Markovin dated the early stage of the North Caucasian CHC later – from the 23rd century BCE up until the 28th–27th centuries BCE [2, p. 125].

The bronze knife-dagger from Burial 9, characterized by its double-edged, foliate blade, sloping shoulders, and a subrectangular tang (Fig. 5, 2), is classified by V.I. Markovin as belonging to the second type – knives of a foliate elongated shape with a well-defined tang. These knives typically exhibit an elongated-oval or elongated-rhombic cross-section, with some blades featuring a rib. This knife type is characteristic of the peak period of metalworking in the North Caucasus CHC [4, p. 92]. The shape of this knife closely resembles blades found in various localities such as the city of Khasavyurt, a mound near the village of Verkhnyi Akbash, Nalchik, Pyatigorsk, the Verkhnyi Rutkha burial ground, Galiat burial ground, Novo-Dzherelievskaya stanitsa, and others [4, p. 34–82; 3, p. 261–281].

Bronze blades were widespread during the Bronze Age in the Middle East, Caucasus, and Eastern Europe. They have been found in Western Asia and in the Caucasus within the sites of the Kura-Araxes CHC and the Maikop-Novosvobodnaya community (hereinafter MNC) [20, p. 122, fig. 42, 12-17; 21, p. 332–334, fig. 41, 1-6]. Early Bronze Age sites in Dagestan, such as the Tad-Shob in Chirkei, Galgalatli, Gemetyube II, Velikent I lower layer, Velikent II, and the Karabudakhkent II burial ground, have yielded bronze blades. Blades have also been identified in significant quantities in Middle Bronze Age sites of the North-Eastern Caucasus: in Chechnya in the Andreevskaya Valley, Grozny District [4, p. 46–48, 62–67, fig. 15, 7, 30-32], in the Bamut burial grounds [22, p. 99, fig. 27, 12], Gatyn-Kala, Belty 2 [23, p. 111, 112, fig. 112, 3-5, 8-10, 12]. In Dagestan, they were found on almost all sites in the amount of 60 specimens: in settlements of Verkhnyi Gunib, Irganai I burial ground [23, p. 111, 112, fig. 107, 2; 108, 4], Miatli, Chirkey [24, p. 145–157, fig. 6, 1, 6, 8; 7, 7], Gertma II, Utamysh, Velikent [25, p. 9, 10, fig. 2, 4-8; 26, p. 36–72, fig. 15, 3, 4; 20, 10; 27, p. 518–546, p. 539, fig. 11, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11], etc.

Blades were prevalent in the North Caucasian CHC [3, p. 254–286, tab. 73, 16; 76, 20; 80, 23–25; 14, p. 93, fig. 37, 1-4; 11, p. 70–72, fig. 26, 1-19; 13, p. 133–166, fig. 8, 16; 11, 5; 19, 3; 44, 7, 10; 48, 12; 28, fig. 3, 7-15; 7, 18, 19; 117, 1-25; 15, p. 115–122, fig. 35, 1-61; 29, p. 139, fig. 68, 1-5] and in the catacomb CHC [30, p. 34–43, tab. 4, 4, 5, 8; 6, 92, 100, etc.].

Six bone hammer-shaped pins were recovered from Burial 13 (Fig. 9, 1-6). Among them, Pins Nos. 2, 3, and 4 belong to the slingshot-shaped subtype (Fig. 9, 2-4), while Pins Nos. 5 and 6 belong to the hammer-shaped subtype (Fig. 7, 5, 6). All the pins lack ornamentation and differ from each other. B.A. Latynin examined the pins and identified three types for Ciscaucasia and five for the Black Sea region [31, p. 34, 87]. V.A. Safronov developed a classification based on the relation between the dimensions of the hammer-shaped head and the length of the shaft, as well as its smallest and largest diameters [32, p. 42-47; 33, p. 11-17]. Pins of this type are considered typical for sites associated with the Yamnaya culture and the pit-catacomb type [34, p. 36, 76]. A.N. Gey further developed a typology of pins for Novotitarovskaya and early Catacomb burials in the Kuban region [19, p. 163-170]. They are also found in localities of the North Caucasian CHC, with an increasing number of discoveries [4, p. 32-53, fig. 4, 11; 9, 15; 10, 2, 4, 5; 14, p. 63, 64, fig. 23, 6-10; 13, p. 133-166, fig. 5, 35; 44, 1; 28, p. 38-43, fig. 5, 1-11; 15, p. 124-126, 131-133, fig. 38, 1-9, 13-26].

The pins were first discovered in Eastern Chechnya, particularly in a female burial lacking grave goods. In various North Caucasian localities, pins were typically found alongside other adornment, in the so-called "pin kits."

Among the artifacts recovered from Burial 17, the following adornments were identified: a bronze figured trapezoidal pendant (Fig. 10, 2), a bronze spiral pierced piece (Fig. 10, 3), a fragment of a bronze bead (Fig. 10, 4), glass paste beads (Fig. 2, 3), and an object made of bone (Fig. 7, 3).

The figured pendant in the form of three rollers with a loop belongs to the claw pendants and is characteristic of the North Caucasian CHC [6, p. fig. 7, 1; 14, p. 82-85, fig. 33, 10-22; 39, 68; 11, p. 75, 77, fig. 29, 10, 11; 28, p. 38-43, fig. 5, 21-23; 15, p. 137, 133, fig. 26, 3; 44, 57]. In Transcaucasia, they are known in the localities of the Early Bronze Kura-Araxes CHC [35, p. 164-170, tab. 34]. They are also found in the sites of the Catacomb and Srubnaya cultures.

Small decorations – bronze spiral pierced piece and beads, as well as glass paste beads and an object made from animal bone – are widespread in Bronze Age sites of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

## Conclusion

The study of burial structures, rituals, and grave goods has revealed parallels in the ritual and grave goods of sites from the initial period of the Middle Bronze Age in Chechnya and Ingushetia, the Central Caucasus, and the eastern regions of the Kuban region, which makes them similar. The examined burials reflect the culture characteristic of the population of the central regions of the North Caucasus, allowing their attribution to the sites of the early and early-middle stages of the North Caucasian CHC – dated to the 24th–20th centuries BCE, according to traditional chronology, and to the 1st quarter of the III millennium BCE to the beginning of the 2nd quarter of the III millennium BCE, according to radiocarbon dating [36, p. 103-111, 112-122].

Studies of the North-Eastern Caucasus sites of the Early and Middle Bronze Age (end of the first half of the III – second half of the III millennium BC) have revealed significant changes and qualitative shifts in cultural and historical development. These changes were manifested in the transformation of the Early Bronze Age culture MNC in western Chechnya and the Kura-Araxes CHC in eastern Chechnya and Dagestan. This transformation ulti-

mately led to the decline of these cultures and the emergence of new archaeological cultures in the Middle Bronze Age. These new cultures exhibit some features of continuity with the preceding culture but also demonstrate distinct and original characteristics, representing a fusion with other cultural traditions and new cultural and historical connections. Changes in the vector of connections were expressed in their weakening with the southern regions and strengthening with the steppe population [5, p. 238].

During this period, the territory became a focal point for intensive interactions between local tribes and populations from the central and western regions of the North Caucasus and Southeastern Europe. Sites of the studied region suggest the influx of foreign tribes that introduced foreign cultural elements to the local environment, significantly impacting the material culture of the indigenous population. Burial mounds and other structures, along with their grave goods, allow to determine the time, nature, and dynamics of ethnocultural contacts between local tribes and newcomers.

Of particular interest are the sites in the lowlands of western Chechnya, where, alongside Maikop and North Caucasian complexes, discoveries include complexes from the ancient Yamnaya, Catacomb, and Srubnaya cultures, as well as post-Kura-Araxes complexes that indicate connections with the Baden culture of the South Caucasus, the active connections of their bearers and the penetration of the latter into this territory. In the eastern part of Chechnya, settlements belonging to the Kura-Araxes CHC have been explored. Materials from Mound I of the Gudermes mounds I burial ground provide significant evidence for the first time, documenting the penetration of tribes, carriers of the North Caucasian CHC, into the territory of Eastern Chechnya.

The emergence of the North Caucasian and steppe tribes in the territory of Eastern Chechnya and Northern Dagestan left a significant imprint on the ethnocultural development of the region. Later, in the second quarter of the II millennium BCE, ethnocultural distinctions among various tribal groups (including local, North Caucasian, and steppe tribes) diminish as a result of the assimilation of the alien population by autochthonous tribes. A gradual process unfolds, transforming the culture of the early stage of the Middle Bronze Age into the Kayakent-Khorochoi culture. This transformation is evident in the changes observed in the funerary ritual and grave goods of later burials in Mound I of the Gudermes burial mounds I, offering a gradual and smooth transition toward the characteristics of the Kayakent-Khorochoi culture. The sites of the lowland zone of Chechnya provide a vivid illustration of the intricate and diverse connections between local tribes and the populations of the central and western regions of the North Caucasus and steppes, showcasing the profound influence of the latter on the culture of the indigenous population.

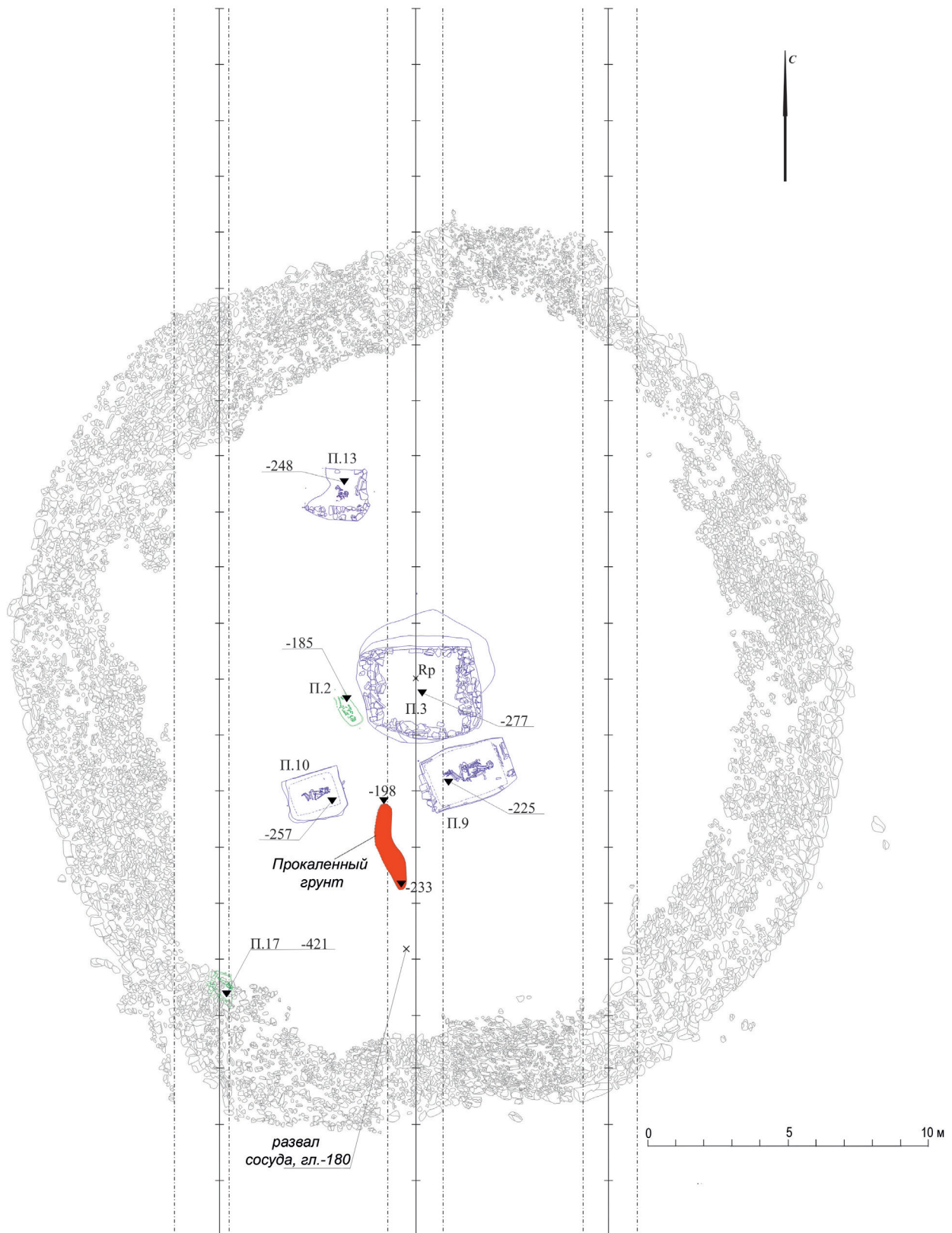
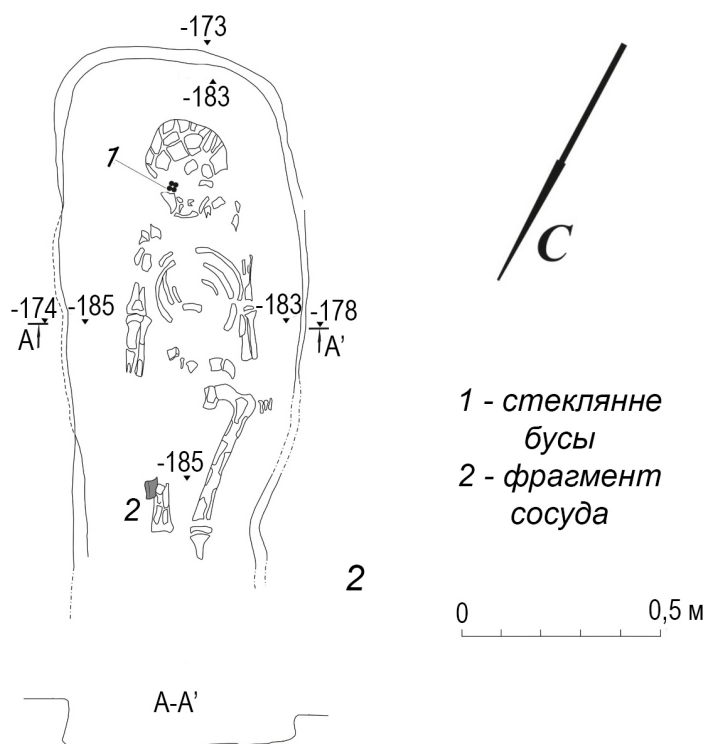
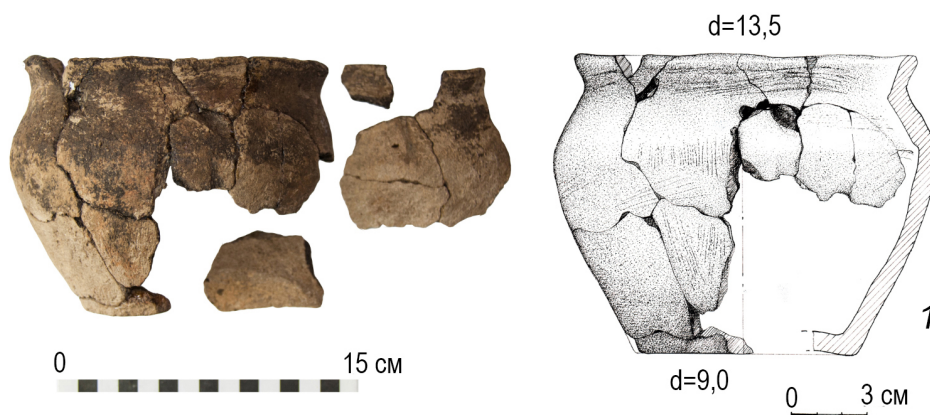


Fig. 1. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. General plan of the mound: burials of the Middle Bronze Age

Рис. 1. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Общий план кургана: погребения среднебронзового времени



1 - стеклянные бусы  
2 - фрагмент сосуда

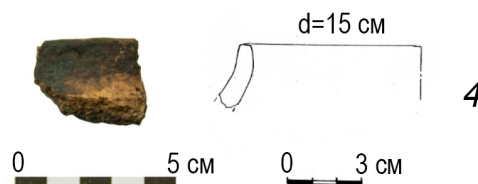
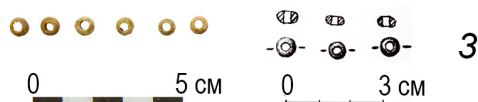


Fig. 2. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I: 1 – vessel from the mound; 2 – plan and cross-section of Burial 2; 3 – glass beads from Burial 2; 4 – fragment of a hand-made vessel’s rim from Burial 2

Рис. 2. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1:1 – сосуд из насыпи; 2 – план и разрез погребения 2; 3 – бусы стеклянные из погребения 2; 4 – фрагмент венчика лепного сосуда из погребения 2

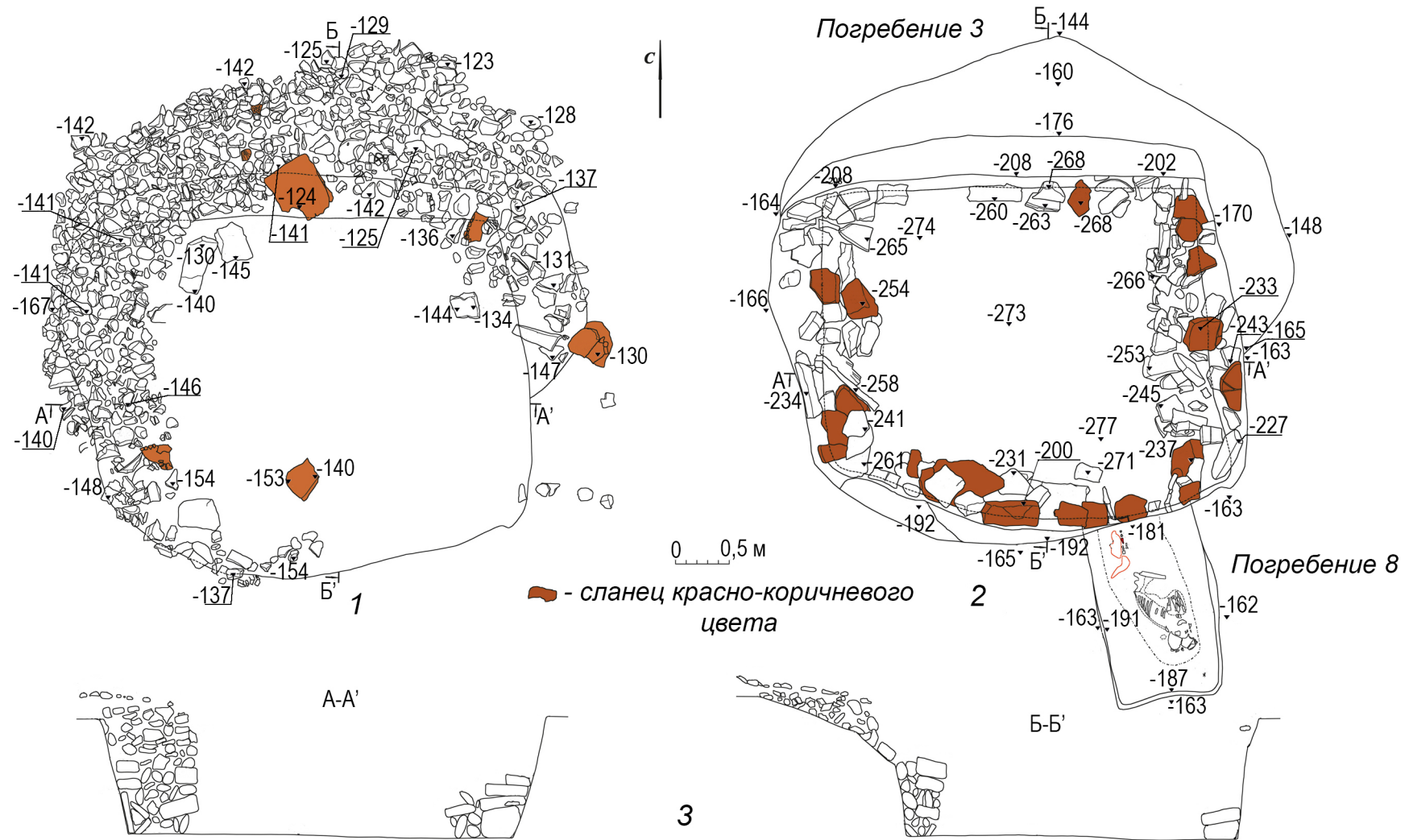


Fig. 3. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 3: 1 – plan of the burial at the upper level; 2 – plan of the burial at the bottom level of the pit walls' stone lining; 3 – cross-sections

Рис. 3. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 3: 1 – план погребения на верхнем уровне; 2 – план погребения на уровне низа каменной обкладки стенок ямы; 3 – разрезы

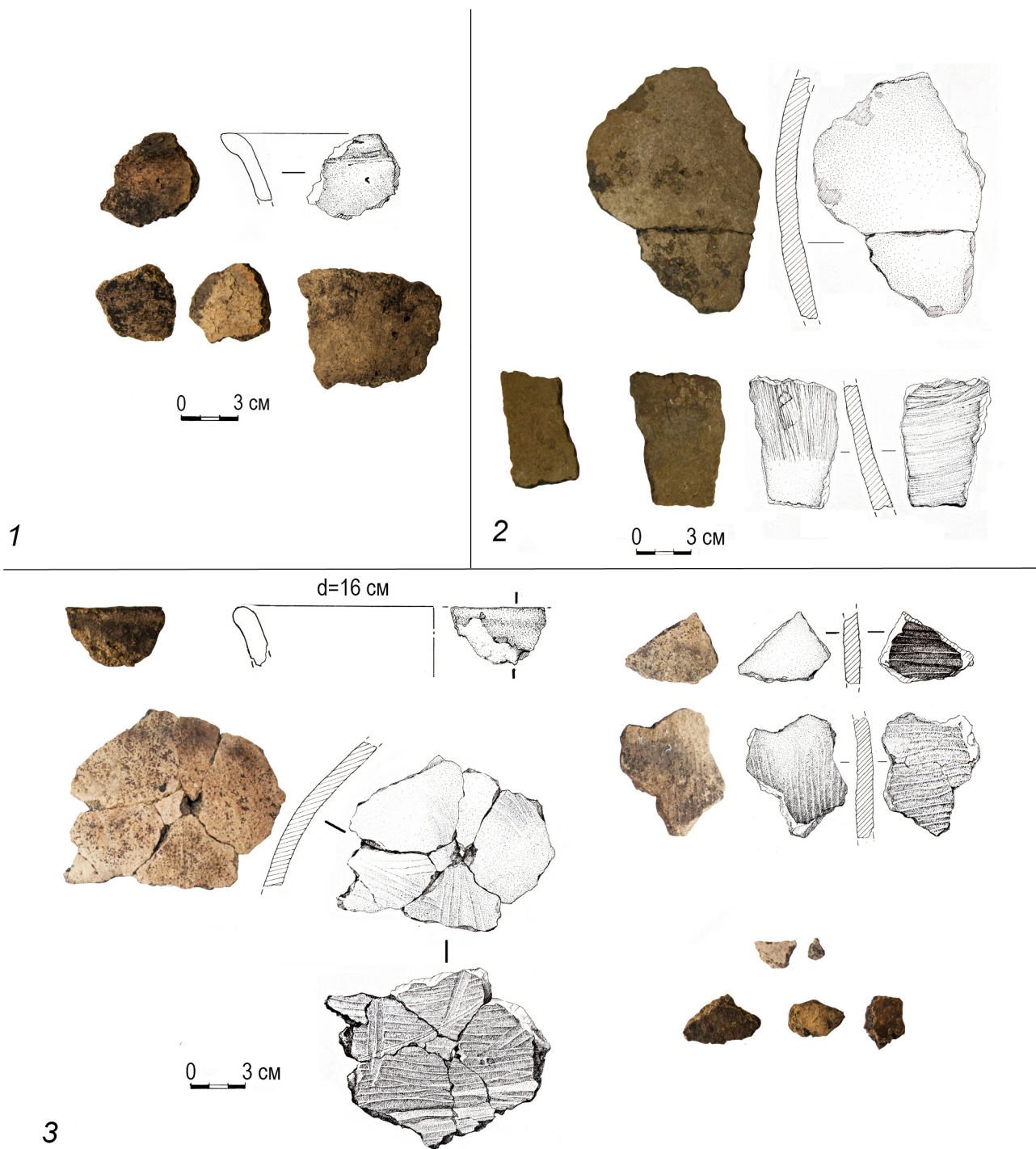


Fig. 4. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 3.  
Grave goods: 1-3 – fragments of hand-made vessels

Рис. 4. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 3.  
Погребальный инвентарь: 1-3 – фрагменты лепных сосудов



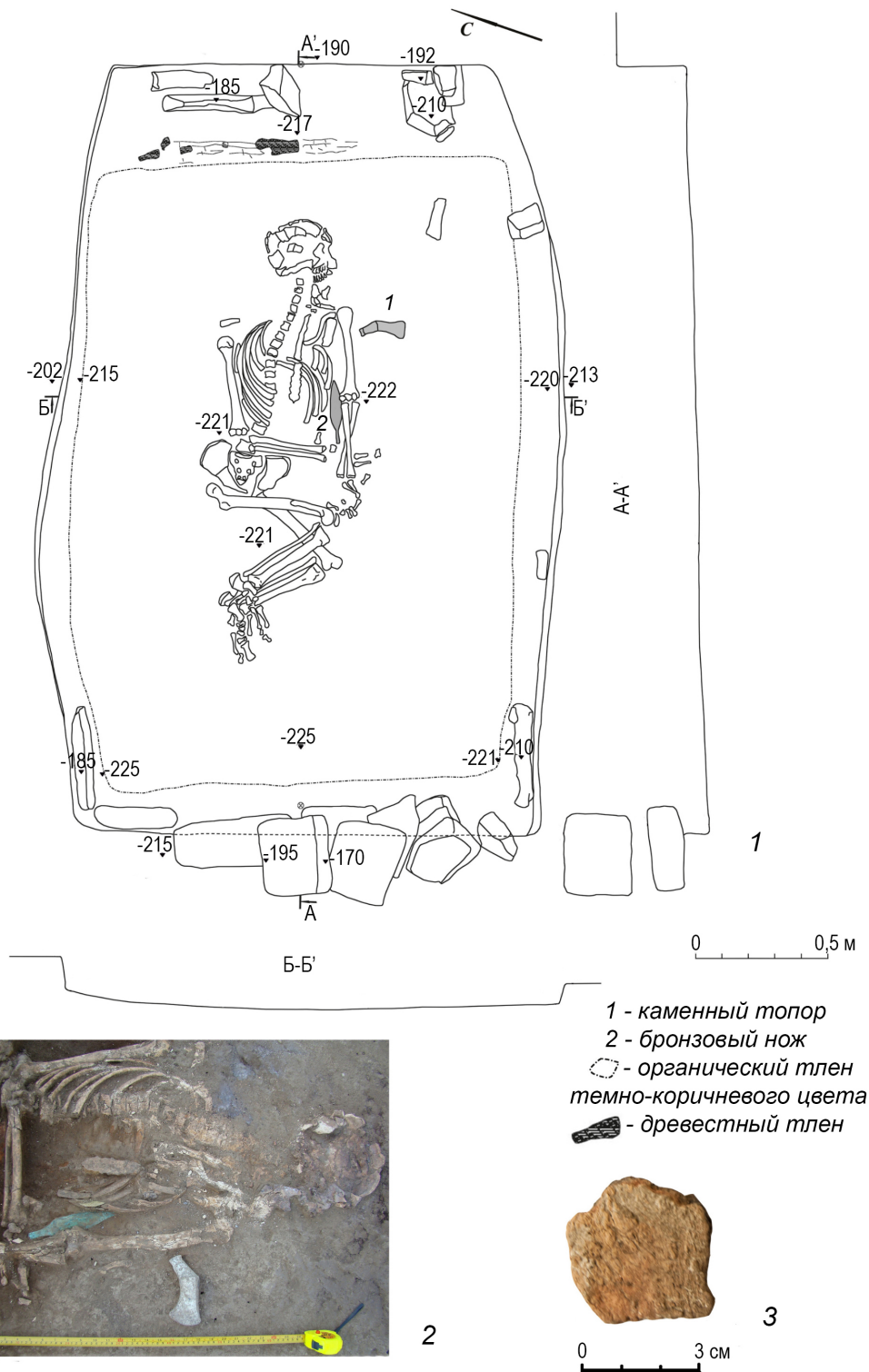


Fig. 5. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 9: 1 – plan and cross-sections; 2 – detail (location of stone axe and bronze knife); 3 – fragment of a vessel from the fill

Рис. 5. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 9: 1 – план и разрезы погребения; 2 – деталь (расположения каменного топора и бронзового ножа); 3 – фрагмент сосуда из заполнения

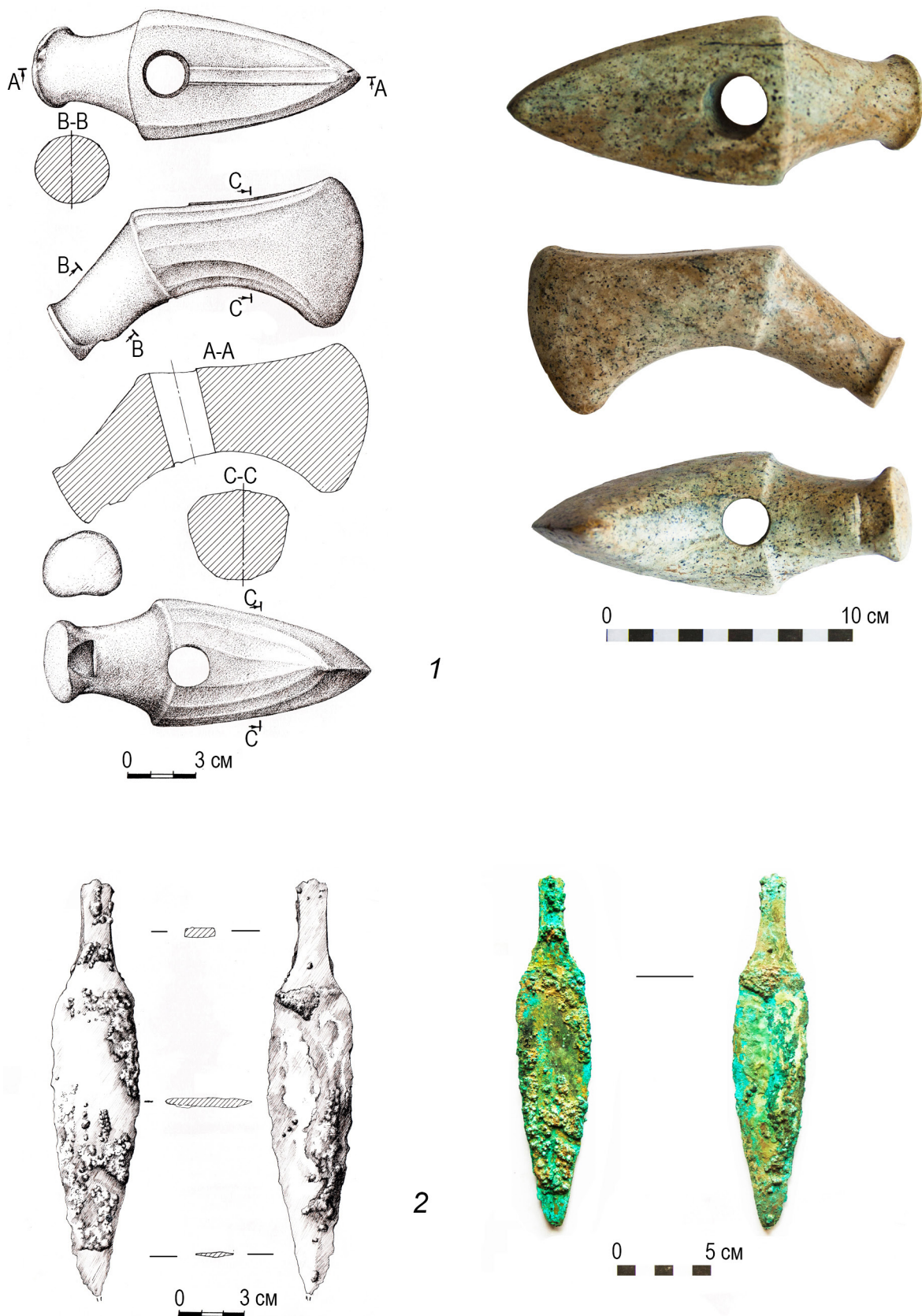


Fig. 6. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 9. Grave goods. 1 – stone axe; 2 – bronze knife

Рис. 6. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 9. Погребальный инвентарь. 1 – каменный топор; 2 – бронзовый нож

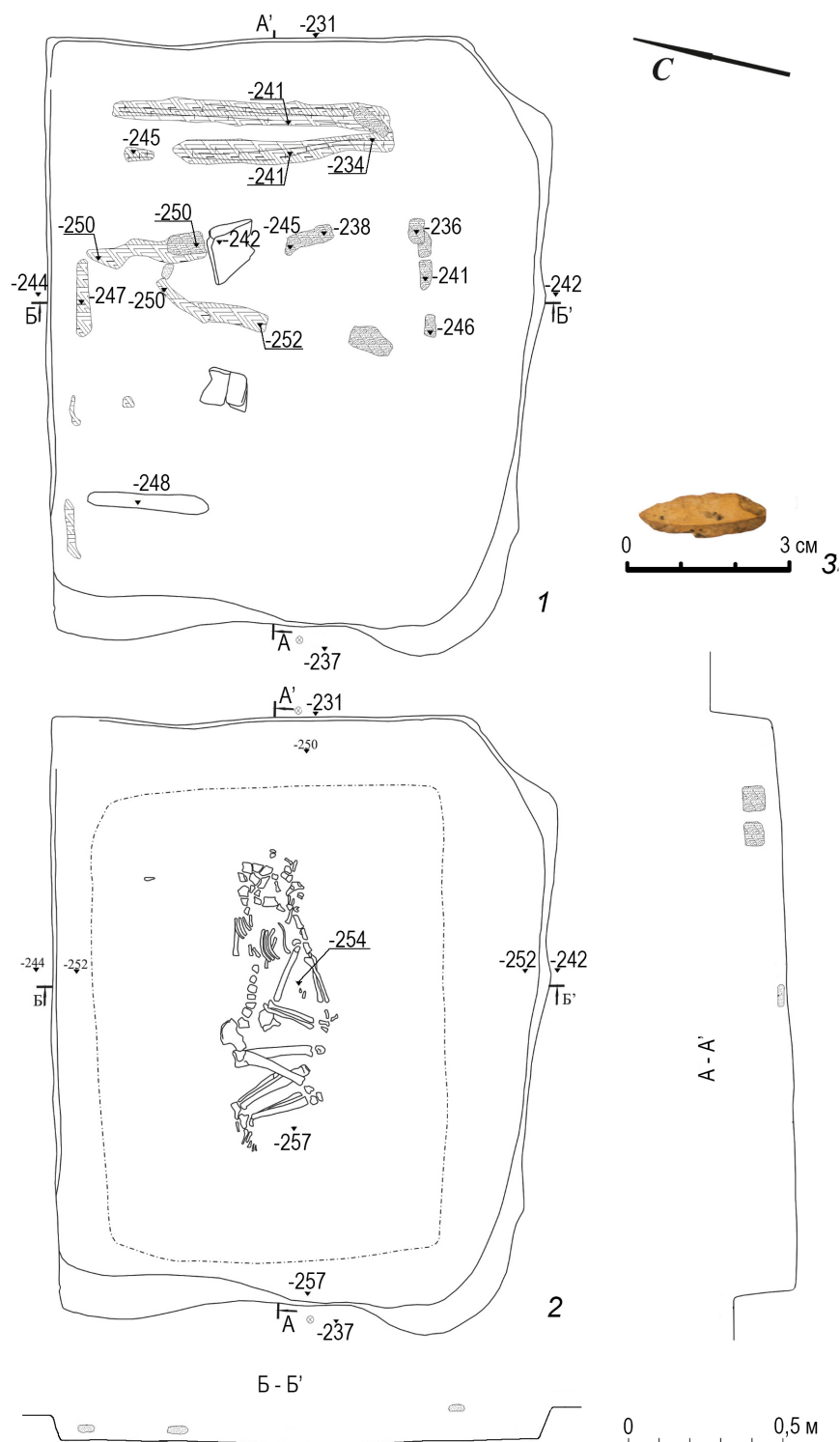


Fig. 7. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 10. 1-2 – plans and cross-sections; 3 – grave goods. Bone object

Рис. 7. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 10. 1-2 – планы и разрезы погребения; 3 – погребальный инвентарь. Костяной предмет

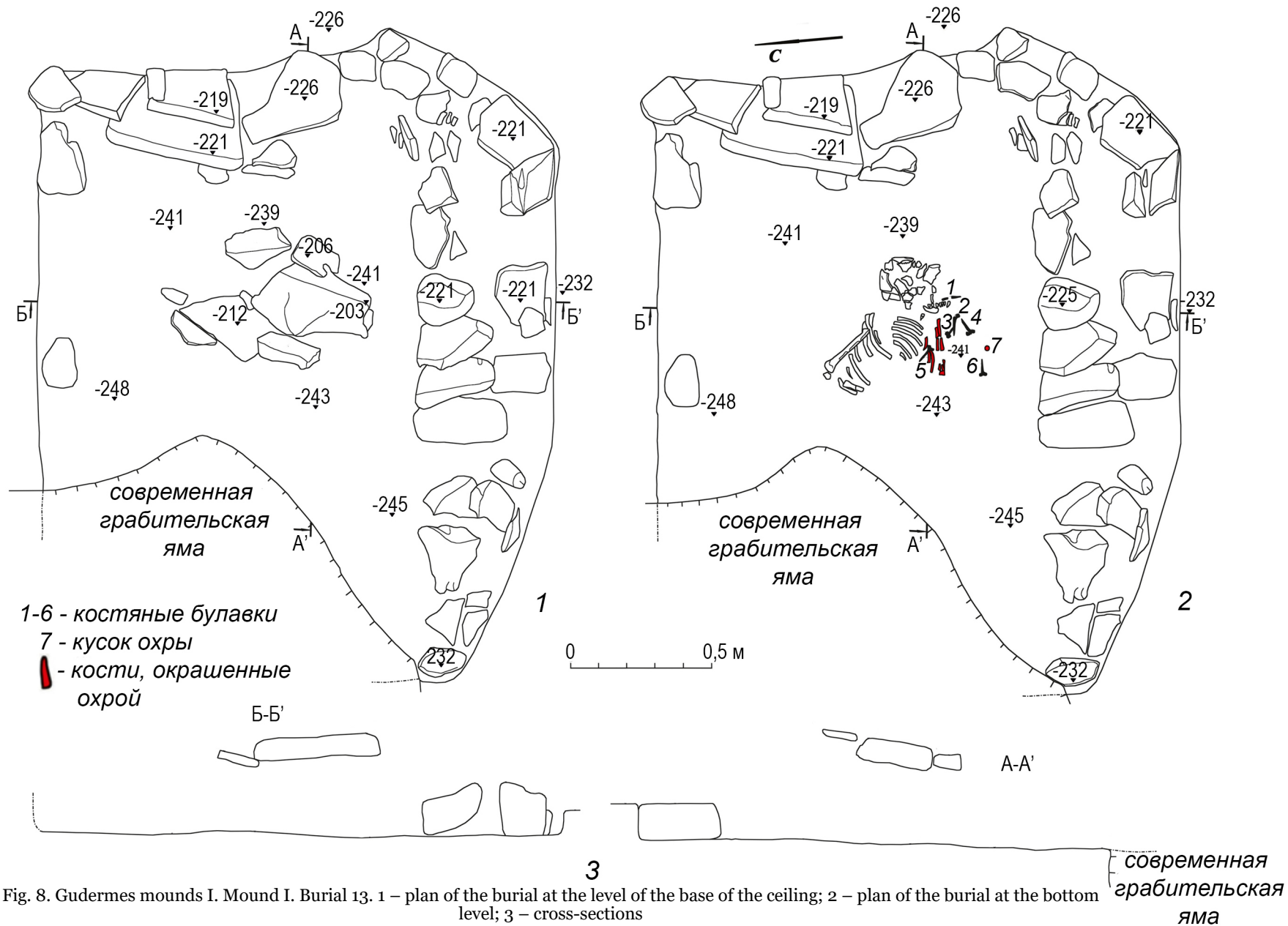


Fig. 8. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 13. 1 – plan of the burial at the level of the base of the ceiling; 2 – plan of the burial at the bottom level; 3 – cross-sections

Рис. 8. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Кургan 1. Погребение 13. 1 – план погребения на уровне основания перекрытия; 2 – план погребения на уровне дна; 3 – разрезы



Fig. 9. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 13. Grave goods: 1-6 – bone pins; 7 – a piece of ochre

Рис. 9. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 13. Погребальный инвентарь: 1-6 – костяные булавки; 7 – кусок охры

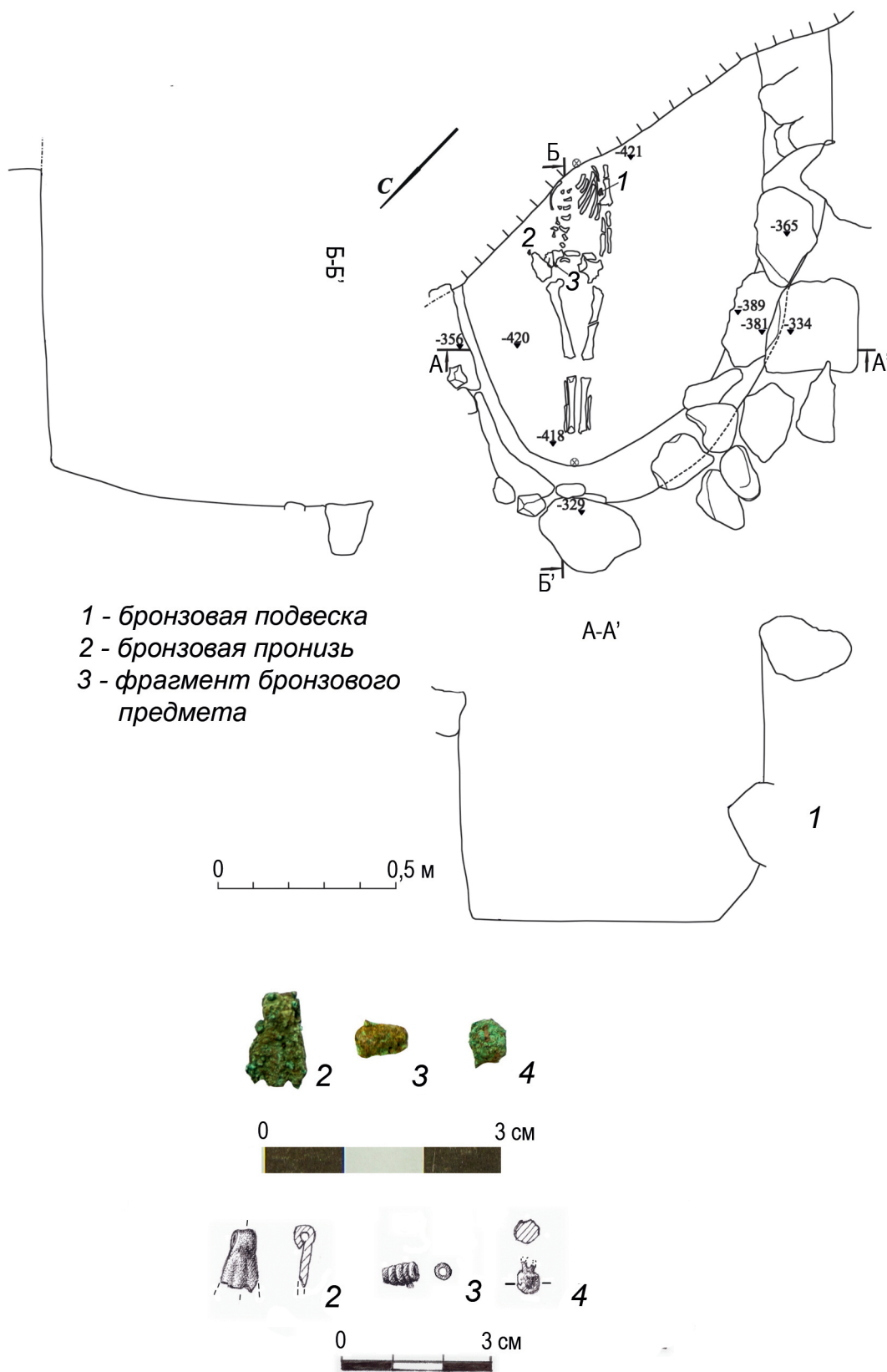


Fig. 10. Gudermes mounds I. Mound I. Burial 17: 1 – plan and cross-sections; 2–4 – grave goods

Рис. 10. Гудермесские № 1 курганы. Курган 1. Погребение 17: 1 – план и разрезы погребения; 2-4 – погребальный инвентарь

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*Поступила в редакцию 07.10.2023 г.*

*Принята в печать 27.11.2023 г.*

*Опубликована 15.12.2023 г.*

*Recieved 07.10.2023*

*Accepted 27.11.2023*

*Published 15.12.2023*