

## ARCHEOLOGY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH19198-122>



Research paper

Najaf A. Museibli,  
Dr. Sci. (History), Professor  
Institute of Archeology, Ethnography and Anthropology  
Azerbaijan National Academy of Science  
[necef\\_museibli@mail.ru](mailto:necef_museibli@mail.ru)

Anar M. Agalarzade,  
Cand. Sci. (History), Associate Prof., Leading Researcher  
Institute of Archeology, Ethnography and Anthropology  
Azerbaijan National Academy of Science  
[anararxeoloq@mail.ru](mailto:anararxeoloq@mail.ru)

Gyulnara K. Akhundova,  
Cand. Sci. (History), Associate Prof., Leading Researcher  
Institute of Archeology, Ethnography and Anthropology  
Azerbaijan National Academy of Science  
[akhundova\\_62@mail.ru](mailto:akhundova_62@mail.ru)

### GABALA KURGANS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTACTS IN THE CAUCASUS IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

*Annotation.* One of the main issues of investigating the Kura-Araxes cultural and historical community is to identify its local versions in the South Caucasus. At the same time, the interaction of the bearers of this culture with the population of other regions also influenced the formation of these local versions; thus, the results of investigations of the sites in Gabala district, located in the northern region of Azerbaijan, are of interest. Archaeological sites belonging to different periods were discovered in the territory of the district. A certain group comprises kurgans dating to the Early Bronze Age. In the structure of the excavated kurgans and burial rites, depending on the chronological stage, various and common features have been revealed. In the village of Amili, Gabala district, three Early Bronze Age kurgans were studied. The complex structure of these kurgans draws special attention. A dolmen-shaped megalithic structure discovered in one of them stands out. Interestingly, the large stones which this structure was built with are cut in the form of anthropomorphic idols. Lines of various sizes were carved on them. The crescent-shaped structures laid out of stone under the kurgan mound are also of interest. The group of pottery has the “staining” property, that is, if you touch it, your hands get stained. Such pottery is not typical for the Kura-Araxes community. The structure of the kurgans and the technological indicators of pottery show that in the 4th-3rd millennia BC there were close ties between the northern regions of Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus.

*Keywords:* Early Bronze Age; Kura-Araxes culture; kurgans; megalithic structure; anthropomorphic idols; burial rite; pottery.

**For citation:** Museibli N.A., Agalarzade A.M., Akhundova G.K. Gabala Kurgans in the context of contacts in the Caucasus in the Early Bronze Age. *History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Caucasus*. 2023. Vol. 19. N. 1. P. 98-122. [doi.org/10.32653/CH19198-122](https://doi.org/10.32653/CH19198-122)

## АРХЕОЛОГИЯ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32653/CH19198-122>



Исследовательская статья

Мусеибли Наджаф Алескер оглу  
д.и.н., профессор, зав. отделом,  
Институт археологии, этнографии и антропологии НАНА, Баку, Азербайджан  
[neccef\\_museibli@mail.ru](mailto:neccef_museibli@mail.ru)

Агаларзаде Анар Мирсамид оглу  
к. и. н., доцент, в.н.с.,  
Институт археологии, этнографии и антропологии НАНА, Баку, Азербайджан  
[anararxeoloq@mail.ru](mailto:anararxeoloq@mail.ru)

Ахундова Гюльнара Камал кызы  
к. и. н., доцент, в.н.с.,  
Институт археологии, этнографии и антропологии НАНА, Баку, Азербайджан  
[akhundova\\_62@mail.ru](mailto:akhundova_62@mail.ru)

### ГАБАЛИНСКИЕ КУРГАНЫ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СВЯЗЕЙ НА КАВКАЗЕ В ЭПОХУ РАННЕЙ БРОНЗЫ

*Аннотация.* Одной из основных проблем исследований кура-аракской культурно-исторической общности является выявление ее локальных вариантов на Южном Кавказе. В то же время взаимодействие носителей этой общности с населением других регионов также повлияло на формирование этих локальных вариантов. С этой точки зрения интересны результаты исследования памятников Габалинского района, расположенного в северном регионе Азербайджана. На территории района обнаружены археологические памятники, относящиеся к разным периодам. Определенную группу составляют курганы, относящиеся к эпохе ранней бронзы. В структуре раскопанных курганов и погребальных обрядах в зависимости от хронологического этапа выявлены различные и общие черты. В селе Амили Габалинского района изучены три кургана эпохи ранней бронзы. Обращает на себя внимание сложное строение этих курганов. В то же время обнаруженное в одном из них дольменообразное мегалитическое сооружение привлекает внимание своей уникальностью. Интересно, что большие камни, из которых построено это сооружение, выполнены в виде антропоморфных идолов. На них вырезаны глубокие линии разного размера. Интересны и сооружения в форме полумесяца, выложенные из камня под насыпью курганов. Группа керамики имеет свойство «пачкающей». Такая керамика не характерна для кура-аракской общности. Структура курганов, технологические показатели керамики показывают, что в IV–III тыс. до н.э. существовали тесные связи северных районов Азербайджана с Северным Кавказом.

*Ключевые слова:* эпоха ранней бронзы; куро-аракская культура; курганы; мегалитическое сооружение; антропоморфные идолы; погребальный обряд; керамика.

**Для цитирования:** Мусеибли Н.А., Агаларзаде А.М., Ахундова Г.К. Габалинские курганы в контексте связей на Кавказе в эпоху ранней бронзы // История, археология и этнография Кавказа. 2023. Т. 19. № 1. С. 98-122. [doi.org/10.32653/ch19198-122](https://doi.org/10.32653/ch19198-122)

## *Introduction*

The Early Bronze Age kurgans located on the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Fig. 1) comprise an original group of archaeological objects that differ in their features from other burial sites of this period and are of undeniable research interest. Three of them were studied by us in Gabala district. After the excavation of the kurgan in the village of Dizakhly of Gabala district, carried out by S. Gaziev in 1966 [1], there have been no excavations of this type of sites in Gabala district until recently. In 2013, the expedition of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of ANAS led by N.A. Museibli discovered previously unrecorded kurgans in the village of Beyuk Amili; two of them were excavated and studied in the same year, the third being excavated in 2020. All the studied sites date back to the Early Bronze Age.

## *Results of the excavations*

*Kurgan 1* is located on the right side of the Gabala-Agdash road, passing through the village of Beyuk Amili. As a result of anthropogenic impacts this kurgan undergone more severe destruction, therefore, it was decided to start excavations from there. Since the kurgan was located directly by the highway, the mound, made of river pebbles with soil, was badly damaged. As a result, it was possible to determine the parameters of the mound only approximately: the diameter is slightly more than 20 m, and the maximum height, preserved only in a small part in the center of the mound, was 1 m.

After the removal of the mound, in the eastern part of the kurgan a burial chamber dug in the yellowish subsoil was discovered. The dark grey spot of the burial pit stood out clearly against the background of the subsoil. The burial chamber in the west-east direction was 1.8 m long, 1 m wide and 90 cm deep. The chamber filling consisted of dark grey soil (perhaps river soil) with river pebbles. At the same time, the number of pebbles decreased as they approached the bottom of the chamber.

The skeleton remains of the buried were discovered in the eastern part of the burial chamber in a disorderly state, the skull of the buried was in the central part of the chamber. To the south of the west-aligned skull was a fragment of the knee bone; a little (20 cm) to the east of the skull were several ribs, a pelvis and parts of the backbone. The arm and leg bones were missing, and no archaeological material was found. Only a few pieces of obsidian without traces of processing were revealed among the stones of the kurgan mound. It is possible that the discovered burial represents the rite of fragmentation of the deceased, and not the result of a grave robbery, since no traces of it were found. We can assume that during the burial, not all parts of the buried were placed in the grave.

*Kurgan 2* is located 200 m southeast of Kurgan 1 on a private farm territory. As a result of agricultural works the mound was partially destroyed. The kurgan mound was laid out of river pebbles and gritstone with soil admixture. At the same time, larger stones (70×50×40 cm, etc.) were concentrated in the central part. The kurgan was 15 m in diameter, 70 cm high.

In the course of clearing and removing the stone mound in the central part of the kurgan, a large amount of ochre mixed with the soil was revealed and observed up to the level of the ancient ground surface. The ochre was sprinkled in the shape of a semicircle or crescent, with its open side facing north. The width of the “crescent” strip was 3 m on the average (Fig. 2, 1). The inner diameter of the semicircle was circa 4.8-5.0 m, and the outer one – circa 9.6-9.8 m. During the excavations of the mound, among the stones, directly above the ancient ground surface, one obsidian fragment was found without traces of processing.

In the central part of the kurgan, edged on three sides (from the south, east and west) by a “crescent”, under densely laid large stones there was a kurgan-shaped earthen mound about 5 m in diameter, up to 25-30 cm thick (Fig. 2, 2), seemingly made of the earth removed from the burial chamber.

A spot of a rectangular shape burial pit with rounded corners, 1.8x1.3 m in size, oriented with the long axis almost along the east-west line (with a slight deviation to the SWW), was located in the center of the kurgan at the level of the ancient ground surface at a depth of 70 cm from the top of the mound. The pit filling consisted of soil with river pebbles and ochre. In the upper part of the filling, on an area with a diameter of 70 cm, an abundant accumulation of ochre was observed. Going deeper, the amount of ochre in the filling of the grave chamber decreased and gradually disappeared. The bottom of the burial pit was located at a depth of 1.8 m from the ancient surface. The pit had a sub-rectangular shape with rounded corners and slightly narrowed towards the bottom; the dimensions of the chamber at the bottom level were 1.3 x 0.70 m. The burial chamber was also oriented with a long axis to the east-west with a slight inclination to the northeast-southwest (Fig. 2, 3).

The skeleton of the buried, discovered on the chamber floor, was covered with thin dark brown organic ashes. The buried lay on the back, in the east-west direction (with a slight SSW inclination in accordance with the configuration of the pit), the head oriented to the west, with arms bent at the elbows, towards the shoulders, with legs strongly bent at the knees, with the feet closer to the pelvis. The skull was turned with the facial bones to the right, to the south (Fig. 2, 4). No archaeological finds were discovered near the buried.

Thus, in the course of the burial rite, first a burial pit was dug, on the bottom of which the deceased was laid and covered with a blanket. Then the burial chamber was filled up with soil and stones, while on the upper level, along with soil filling and stones, the pit was densely covered with ochre. After filling the chamber, a small earthen mound 25-30 cm thick and 5 m in diameter was erected above it, and large stones were laid on top of this mound. At the next stage, a much larger stone mound was laid, about 15 m in diameter, during the construction of which ochre was sprinkled in the form of a semicircle in the center of the kurgan.

Basing on radiocarbon analysis of the bone of the buried (Beta – 356781. Cal BC 2560 to 2350), Kurgan 2 was dated to the middle – third quarter of the 3rd millennium BC, i.e. the last stage of the Early Bronze Age.



*Kurgan 3* is located on the southeastern edge of the village Beyuk Amili, surrounded by crop fields. It was 16 m in diameter, 50-60 cm high (Fig. 3, 1). The mound consisted of gritstone mixed with soil. Because of the accumulation of large stones, the territory of the kurgan had not been plowed.

During the clearing of the mound, it was established that the stones in the northeastern sector were laid more densely and concentrated. In this part of the kurgan mound, a large dolmen-like structure made of gritstone (90×90×20 cm, 90×80×30 cm, etc.) was cleared, oriented with a long axis in the west-east alignment (Fig. 3, 1, 4) and surrounded by a dense layer of smaller stones, pebbles. This structure was 3.2 m long in total, more than 1 m wide and the inner corridor-like space was 60-70 cm wide. Large, edge-wise stones that made up the structure were used to make the inner surface of its walls smooth. These stones were possibly slightly leveled.

As the excavations continued, it was found that this structure was a kind of a passage-dromos to a large burial chamber-pit. The corridor-shape inner part of this passage was filled with earth and relatively small stones. At the western end, next to the burial pit, the upper part of the passage was covered with a large stone (1.3×0.9×0.35 m) laid transversely (Fig. 5, 1-3), which formed a rectangular arch about 1.0 m high. In this part, the “dromos” rested on stones laid out in a burial pit about 1.0 m deep, and its eastern half lay on the subsoil and went out to the edge of the kurgan mound. This narrow passage, which in fact, did not lead to the burial chamber, was apparently practically unused and had a symbolic meaning.

On the stones that make up this structure, deep incisions were carved in different directions. The upper (front) surface of the stone covering this “dromos” was completely incised with such lines (Fig. 4, 1; 6, 1). On other stones, lines were also cut only on their upper surfaces (Fig. 4, 1, 2) and, probably, already after the construction of this passage-dromos. On two large stones in the northern wall of the “dromos”, deep lines were also carved in different directions (Fig. 6, 2, 3). Stones of various sizes with such lines were also revealed among the stones around the megalith and in other parts of the stone mound (Fig. 4, 3, 4; 6; 7). On the sides, some stones with lines from the described construction and from the mound were processed, apparently in order to give them an elongated (anthropomorphic) shape.

In the course of clearing and removing the stone mound, it was revealed that the stones in the northwestern sector were laid out in a concentrated manner, forming a rectangular-oval platform, oriented along with the “dromos” located at its eastern end in the east-west direction. After the removal of the first layer of this stone cluster, in the lower layer oval-shaped ledges made of stones at the corners of this site were recorded (Fig. 3, 2). It should be noted that these ledges filled with stones were deepened in the subsoil up to 0.5 m.

At the same level with this platform covering the burial pit, in the southern part of the kurgan, a dense pavement made of river pebbles was revealed, forming a crescent, with its open side facing the burial chamber. For the construction of this structure, a trench of the same shape was dug in the subsoil to a depth of 15-20 cm and then filled with stones.

The width of the “crescent” in the center was more than 1.5 m; the distance between the ends was 10 m (Fig. 3, 2).

As a result of the clearing of the stone platform with a dromos in the northeastern sector, a sub-rectangular burial pit filled with stones with rounded corners, oriented along the east-west line with a long axis was uncovered. It was 8.3 m long, about 4 m wide, 1.3 m deep from the ancient surface and 1.9 m from the top of the kurgan. The depth of the main part of the 6 m long chamber was 1.3 m and the stepped 2.3 m long entrance on the eastern side – 0.6 m (Fig. 3, 3). The side walls of the chamber were slightly inclined downwards. In the central part of the burial chamber at a depth of 50 cm, 1.5 m to the northwest of the “dromos”, a 40 cm high stone column, with a cross section of 15×25 cm was dug in (Fig. 5, 4). No traces of any overlapping of the burial pit were discovered.

Poorly preserved remains of 21 human skeletons (according to the remains of skulls) were revealed in the near-bottom 50-60-cm depth of the burial pit filling. The bones were scattered, lying chaotically, unsystematic. Anatomically intact skeletons and joints were not observed. Only in one case could it be assumed that here the burial was carried out on the side. Clearly, the burials were made over a long period of time, and with each new sub-burial, the order of the previous human remains was disturbed. It is noteworthy that almost every skull was accompanied by a thigh or ankle bone laying on the side. At the same time, it is possible that the scattered skeleton remains in the burial chamber are the result of a multiple burial practice.

Along with human remains, 39 ceramic vessels relatively intact and in fragments from the early stage of the Kura-Araxes cultural-historical community (CHC) were revealed in the burial chamber. 13 of them were restored. No other artifacts were found. The vessels and their fragments were placed irregularly, randomly; it is impossible to determine their connection with specific human remains.

All the vessels are of dark grey and ochre red color. In some cases, areas on the surface of one dark grey vessel have red-brown spots, and vice versa – the surface of a red-ochre vessel has dark grey spots, which reflects the uneven firing of the vessels. Pottery consists of relatively large, two or three-handled wide-necked containers (Fig. 8, 1-3), two-handled pot-shaped vessels with a low (Fig. 8, 4-5) and relatively high wide neck (Fig. 9), one of which has one handle (Fig. 9, 3), and deep rounded bowls with an unexpressed rim (Fig. 10). The ornament on pottery is completely absent.

All the handles on these vessels are vertical, slightly elongated, and have a “semi-spherical” shape, a characteristic feature for the pottery of the Kura-Araxes culture. The handles of the pot-shaped vessels with a low neck connect the mouth to the shoulder, while the handles of the pot-shaped vessels with a high neck are, in most cases, attached with the upper end to the middle of the neck, and the lower end to the shoulders. Two bowls also have elongated hemispherical handles, some have protrusions-handles or handle-holders (Fig. 10, 3). Some bowls are unevenly molded and have an asymmetrical shape; the bottom of some of them is concave.

All the vessels are made of clay with sand admixture. The surface of most of the vessels is covered with a thick whitish patina. Due to poor-quality composition and poorly

elutriated dough and weak firing some of them crumble. Almost all reddish-brown (ochre) colored vessels are categorized as “staining surface” pottery.

The presented pottery and the burial custom make it possible to determine the chronology of Kurgan 3. Repeated mass graves in large burial chambers, which clearly represent long-functioning family-clan burial vaults, are typical of the first stage of the Kura-Araxes CHC. The technical, typological and morphological characteristics of pottery found in Amili Kurgan 3 also testify its belonging to this period. Similar pottery vessels were found, in particular, in Kurgan 5 of the Uzun-Rama burial ground (Goranboy district of the Republic of Azerbaijan) belonging to the Kura-Araxes CHC. The radiocarbon dates of this kurgan are 3629-3373 BC (Laboratory ID: IAAA-153414), i.e. the kurgan dates back to the second – third quarter of the 4th millennium BC [2, pp. 179–180, 182]. We should also mention that in Uzun Rama Kurgan 5, a mass burial was also carried out, which is typical for the first stage of the Kura-Araxes CHC. On the basis of the above-stated, we date Kurgan 3 of the Amili burial ground the mid-4th millennium BC.

## Discussion

The results of the excavations in the Amili kurgans should be interpreted in three directions: 1) the structure of the kurgans; 2) burial rite; 3) pottery. Based on this, it is important to interpret the results of the excavations of the Amili kurgans in a local and regional context.

*Kurgan structures.* All the kurgans of the Amili burial ground had mounds, which were initially stone mounds that eventually were “covered” with soil. Particular attention should be paid to the “lunar structures” revealed in Kurgans 2 and 3 at the level of the ancient ground surface. In Kurgan 2, it was sprinkled with a layer of ochre, and in Kurgan 3, a large crescent was laid out from a layer of stones. In both cases, they bordered the burial chambers on the south/southwest side. Undoubtedly, these “constructions” in the form of a crescent are associated with funeral ceremonies, with astral religious ideas of the population that left these kurgans behind.

In the South Caucasus, in some Chalcolithic era kurgans of the Leilatepe culture, there were stone inlays in the shape of a crescent/horseshoe [3]. However, such inlays in these kurgans somehow differ from the “crescents” in the Early Bronze Age kurgans, mainly with more closed forms.

Lunar constructions were found in the Early Bronze Age burial sites, both in the South and the North Caucasus. For instance, in Khachbulag Kurgan 1 (Dashkesan district of the Republic of Azerbaijan), a crescent-form mound made of yellow clay was found surrounding the main burial chamber from the south [4, p. 37]. In its structure and shape this “crescent” of the Khachbulag Kurgan 1 is identical to the “crescent” of the Amili Kurgan 2.

A crescent-shape stone pavement around the grave was revealed in Kudurlu Kurgan 2, unearthed in Sheki district (Fig. 11, 4). Just like in Amili Kurgan 3, it surrounded the burial structure on the south side. The “crescent” in the central part was 3 m wide, the

inner diameter and the distance between its ends were 10 m and the outer diameter was equal to max 14 m [5, p. 94].

A “crescent” form large stone laying surrounding burial chamber from the southwest was also found in Kurgan 1 in the second group of the Early Bronze Age kurgans (Fig. 12, 1), explored near the village Kishpek in Kabardino-Balkaria [6, fig. 3]. The “crescents” in the kurgans of Kudurlu and Kishpek are similar in shape and arrangement of the lunar laying in Amili Kurgan 3 and indicate a certain similarity of their burial customs. Crescent-shape stone structures were also revealed in the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age burial sites in the South Caucasus [7]. We assume that the idea of the “crescent” appeared in the North Caucasus under the influence of the South Caucasus tradition.

The oval stone protuberances along the edges at the upper level of the burial chamber in Amili Kurgan 3 vaguely resemble similar laying of Kurgan 1 of the Kudurlu burial ground (Fig. 11, 2): here, oval-rounded stone layings along the perimeter surrounded the central stone mound of the kurgan at the level of the ancient ground surface [5, pp. 90–91].

The megalithic structure in the form of a “dromos” passage (Fig. 4; Fig. 5) revealed in Amili Kurgan 3 is of particular interest. All the large side stones used in its construction, as well as the slab for blocking the passage, are carved on the “front” surface with deep lines of various lengths and directions. These incised lines were applied disorderly and do not depict any particular object. It can be assumed that they were incised into the stone during the burial rite in the kurgan and, taking into account the repeated burials that took place here, it is possible that they were applied each time at each burial.

Almost all stones of this design had a flattened-elongated pear shape (Fig. 6). As noted above, such stones of various sizes were also found around the “dromos” passage and among the stones of the kurgan mound (Fig. 7). The edges of most of the stones were slightly processed, apparently with the aim of giving them some form, possibly anthropomorphic. Since none of these stones reflect obvious human features, it can be assumed that they represent some kind of stone idols.

Facts of the use of stones, steles of an anthropomorphic appearance were repeatedly recorded in the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age burial sites of the Caucasus. In the burial chamber of the Seyidli kurgan (Khachmaz district of the Republic of Azerbaijan), belonging to the Leilatepe culture, a large river stone resembling a human figure was found [8, p. 27]. In the mound of the Early Bronze Age Kurgan 3 of the Gobustan archaeological complex, a 1.4 m high anthropomorphic oblong stone slab was discovered, originally set vertically – its upper part was hewn on both sides, conventionally representing the head and shoulders of a human being [9, pp. 36-37]. A fragment of an anthropomorphic tuff slab was found in the mound of the Middle Bronze Age Hasansu kurgan (Agstafa district of the Republic of Azerbaijan) [10, p. 25]. In Nakhchivan, on the Nabi Yurdu plateau, which is part of the Gemigaya complex of sites, at an altitude of 3200 m above sea level, in the Late Bronze Age burial kurgan, a vertically installed 1.6 m high stone resembling a human figure was found as well [11, p. 37].

The closest analogues of the stone idols found in Amili Kurgan 3 seem to be presented in the Early Bronze Age burial complexes of Kabardino-Balkaria. Here, in the already mentioned Kishpek Kurgan 1, two stone slabs covering the top of the stone box-type

burial were anthropomorphic steles (Fig. 12, 2, 3). Stone anthropomorphic steles have been discovered here in kurgans belonging to different stages of the Bronze Age. They were often of secondary use as a building material in the construction of kurgans. So, among the stones of the mound of the Scythian time kurgan near the village Nartan, two anthropomorphic stone steles (Fig. 12, 4, 5), resembling in shape the stone “idols” 1 and 3 of Amili Kurgan 3 (Fig. 6, 1, 3) were found. The upper part of the large (135×66×63 cm) stele from Nartan is covered with deep incised lines-grooves forming a mesh pattern (Fig. 12, 5), which to a certain extent also resembles the stones with incised lines of Amili Kurgan 3. It is assumed that these stone idols were first kept in heathen temples, and later, in the Early Bronze Age and subsequent periods, having lost their original meaning, were reused in kurgans [6, pp. 219-220, 243-251, Fig. 42, 4]. Unlike them, the idols of the Amili Kurgan 3 were initially used in the burial rite.

Speaking about the structure of the kurgans, one more interesting point should be mentioned. Around the main burial chamber of Kurgan 3 in Kishpek, at the level of the ancient ground surface, 6 oval pits filled with several layers of stones were revealed; no artifacts were found in them [6, Fig. 21, p. 194]. Similar stone accumulations were revealed in two places at different levels and in Kudurlu Kurgan 2 [5, p. 91]. The same accumulation of stones in a round pit was discovered in the Shamkirchay Kurgan 2 of the mid-3rd millennium BC: here, in the area between the central burial chamber and the cromlech, a pit 90×90 cm in diameter, 25 cm deep was dug in the subsoil, filled with densely packed river pebbles; no artifacts were found in it either [12, p. 105]. The purpose of such pits, which are undoubtedly related to the burial ritual, is not yet clear.

*Funeral rites.* Speaking about the funeral rite, we should note again that the burial chamber of Amili Kurgan 3, to which the “dromos” passage led and in which the remains of 21 buried were found, was a long-term family and ancestral burial-vault. Under-kurgan burial structures, in which multiple burials were made, are known not only in Gabala district, where the Amili kurgans are located, but also in other districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan [1; 2; 13 and others]. However, in the latter, human skeletons were found directly at the level of the chamber bottom, in contrast to the burial in Amili Kurgan 3, and the chambers were clearly not used repeatedly; burials were made in a very short period of time, possibly at once. Besides, they contain traces of strong fire in the burial chamber, which was not recorded in Amili. That is, we can say about a significant difference in the funeral rituals.

The method of burial of the deceased in the Amili kurgan 2 – on the back with strongly bent legs and arms bent at the elbows, hands lying at the shoulders – is an extremely rare occurrence for the Early Bronze Age of the Caucasus. A similar position of the corpse, i.e. on the back with legs bent to the pelvis was observed in the above-mentioned Khachbulag Kurgan 1, but in our case the left hand of the deceased was rested on the stomach, and the right hand was extended along the body [4, p. 38, fig. 6]. A burial in a similar position was also found in the Early Bronze Age Kurgan XXII in Trialeti [14, Table 2, 3]. Lastly, the closest analogue in the position of the buried is also in the mentioned Kurgan 1 of the Kudurlu burial ground (Fig. 11, 1): here, too, the burial was performed on the back with legs strongly bent to the pelvis, but the hands bent at the elbows rested on the



stomach. The skeleton was discovered at the level of the ancient ground surface, with its head to the west. In Kudurlu Kurgan 2, the shin bones of the buried's legs were laid across on the thigh-bones [5, p. 92, 103], which suggests a rite of dismemberment (?).

In addition, it should be noted that in all of the five abovementioned kurgans (Amili 2, Khachbulag 1, Kudurlu 1 and 2, Trialeti XXI), the deceased were buried in the west-east alignment with their heads to the west. In these sites, there seems to be a clear similarity in this detail of the funeral rites. We should also point out that the large burial chambers of the Kura-Araxes CHC kurgans were also often built in the west-east direction with their entrance from the east side [2; 13], as in Amili Kurgan 3, which is much older than the first ones.

*Pottery.* Pottery material, represented by clay vessels, was found only in Amili Kurgan 3. These are red-ochre and dark grey containers and pot-shaped vessels, bowls. As already noted, most of the red-ochre vessels belong to the category of the so-called pottery with "staining surface", which is not characteristic for the pottery of the Kura-Araxes CHC, but is widespread on the sites of the North Caucasus [18, pp. 351-352], is also presented in the mentioned Kishpek kurgans [6]. But, on the other hand, the representative ceramic complex of Amili Kurgan 3 typologically represents typical samples of pottery of the Kura-Araxes CHC. It is possible that here we are dealing with a combination of two technological traditions.

Out of the Early Bronze Age sites, "staining pottery" was found only in the Telmankend kurgans in the south of Azerbaijan (Astara district of the Republic of Azerbaijan) [15, pp. 13-14]. We would like to note that previously attention was drawn to the fact that the bronze spearhead found in the Telmankend Kurgan 1 is similar to those from the sites of the Novosvobodnenski culture of the North Caucasus [16, p. 109], the date of which is determined in the range of the second – third quarter of the 4th millennium BC [17, pp. 80-93]. The Telmankend kurgans can be attributed to the same period and their relation to the Novosvobodnenski culture can be assumed.

In conclusion, we would like point out that the smallest processed anthropomorphic (?) stone found in the mound of Amili Kurgan 3 is interesting in its shape (Fig. 7, 6) and, possibly, is an imitation of a dagger: broad-leaved daggers known from the sites of Novosvobodnenski culture, i.e. from Kishpek Kurgan 1, have a similar shape. (Fig. 7, 7) [6, fig. 9, 13].

## Conclusion

The studied Amili kurgans in Gabala district of the Republic of Azerbaijan, together with the previously studied kurgans in the north-west of Azerbaijan, make it possible to identify a local variant of the Kura-Araxes CHC in this zone. At the same time, it should be noted that, judging by the available data, Amili Kurgan 3 dates from the mid-3rd quarter of the 4th millennium BC, and kurgans Amili 2, Khachbulag 1 (Dashkesan district of the Republic of Azerbaijan), Kudurlu 1 and 2 (Sheki district of the Republic of Azerbaijan) belong to the mid-3rd millennium BC. Despite the significant difference



in time, they, as noted above, reflect a lot in common in the funeral rituals. These are stone mounds, crescent-shaped inlays made of stone, clay, ochre, framing burial pits by them on the south/southwest side, obsidian flakes found in the kurgan, ochre, small round-oval inlays adjacent to stone mounds above the burial pits, stone constructions in the form of passages-dromos, burials on the back with legs strongly bent to the pelvis, orientation of burial chambers and burials in the west-east direction. Kurgans Amili 2, Khachbulag 1, Kudurli 1 and 2 bring together the fact of the absence or very limited presence of archaeological artifacts.

As noted, the closest analogues of large lunar layings and stone anthropomorphic “idols” from kurgans Amili 3 and Kudurlu Kurgan 1 were found in the Early Bronze Age kurgans near the villages Kishpek and Nartan in Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus. The red-ochre “staining pottery” discovered in the Amili Kurgan 3 is associated with the Kura-Araxes culture in its morphological features, and is close to the North Caucasian traditions in its technological features, which raises the question of contacts between the population of these regions in the Early Bronze Age. It can be assumed that this is a reflection of local migrations from north to south. As a result, a group of syncretic sites emerged in the northwestern region of Azerbaijan (Gabala, Sheki, Dashkesan), combining the features of the Kura-Araxes CHC, on the one hand, and the Novosvobodni culture of the North Caucasus, on the other.

R.M.Munchayev, on the basis of studies of domestic sites on the territory of Chechnya and Ingushetia, came to the conclusion that there were syncretic sites in these regions, which appeared under the strong influence of the Kura-Araxes culture as a result of the penetration of certain ethnic groups from the South Caucasus into these territories [18, pp. 364-365]. Based on the excavations of the Kishpek and Kudurlu kurgans, researchers noted the interaction between the inhabitants of the North and South Caucasus [19; 20]. The excavations of the Amili kurgans in the Gabala district once again show that these movements of the tribes were mutual throughout the entire period of the Early Bronze Age and, possibly, were due to economic and cultural needs. At the same time, judging by the dating of Amili Kurgan 3, these connections are already recorded for mid-4th millennium BC, and this at the same time raises the question of the probable earlier dating of the Kishpek kurgans.



Fig. 1. Location of Early Bronze Age kurgans on the territory of Azerbaijan mentioned in the article: 1-3 – Amili kurgans; 4 - Khachbulag kurgan; 5, 6 – Kyudurlin kurgans; 7, 8 – Telmankend kurgans; 9 – Shamkirchay kurgan

Рис. 1. Местоположение курганов эпохи ранней бронзы на территории Азербайджана, упоминаемых в статье: 1-3 – Амилинские курганы; 4 – Хачбулагский курган; 5, 6 – Кюдурлинские курганы; 7, 8 – Тельманкендские курганы; 9 – Шамкирчайский курган

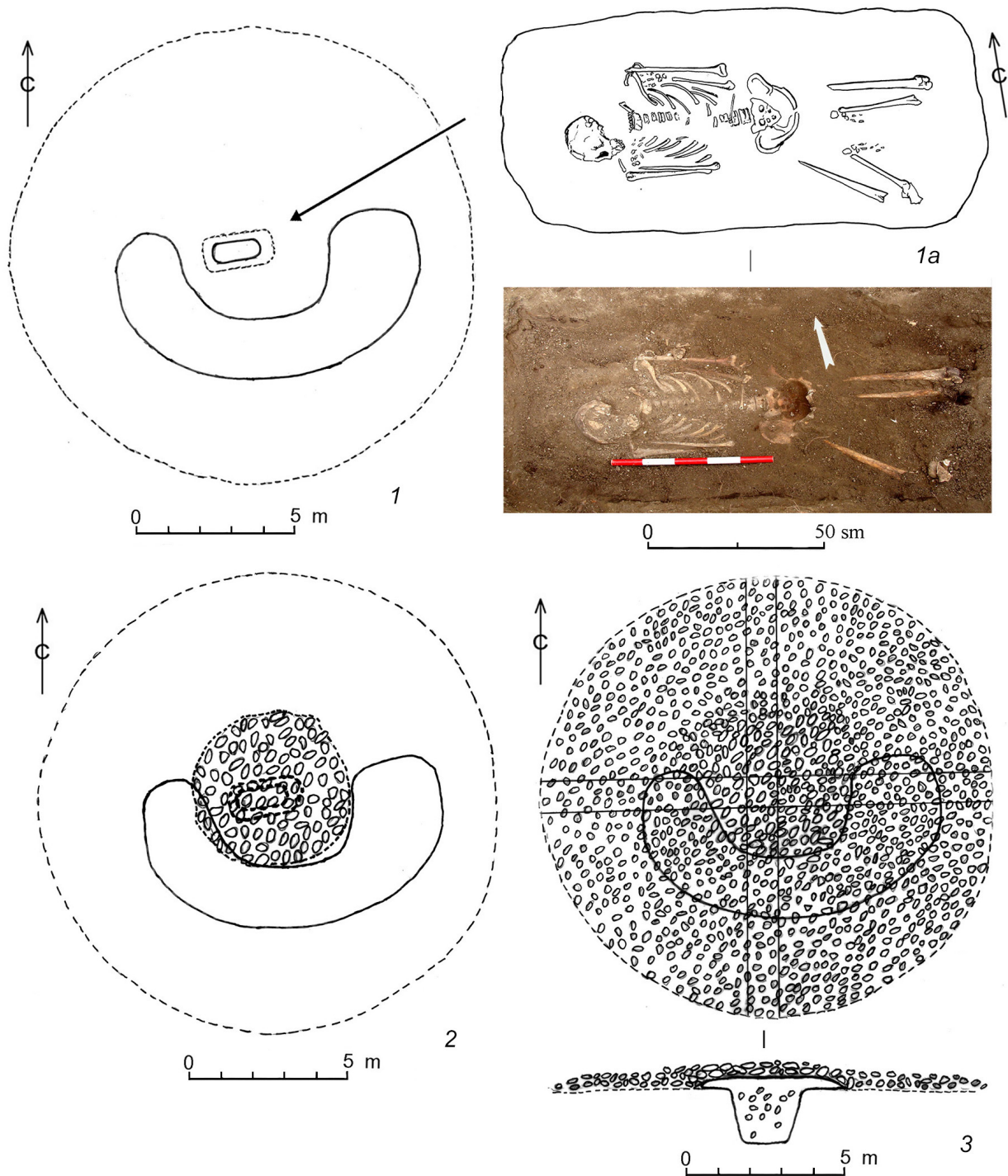


Fig. 2. Amili Kurgan 2. Construction stages (1-3) and burial (1a)

Рис. 2. Амиллинский курган № 2. Этапы сооружения (1-3) и погребение (1a)



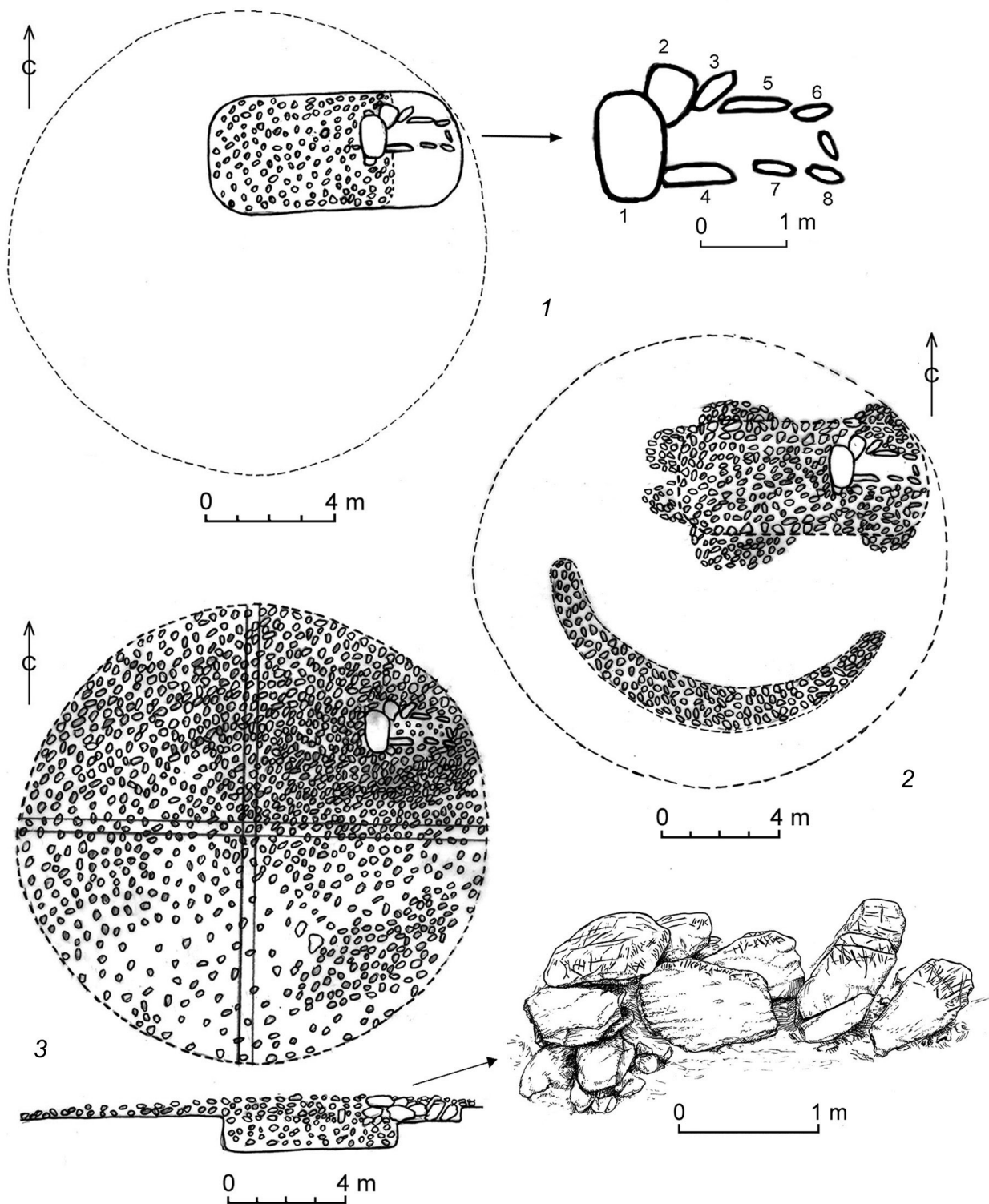


Fig. 3. Amili Kurgan 3. Construction stages

Рис. 3. Амилинский курган № 3. Этапы сооружения



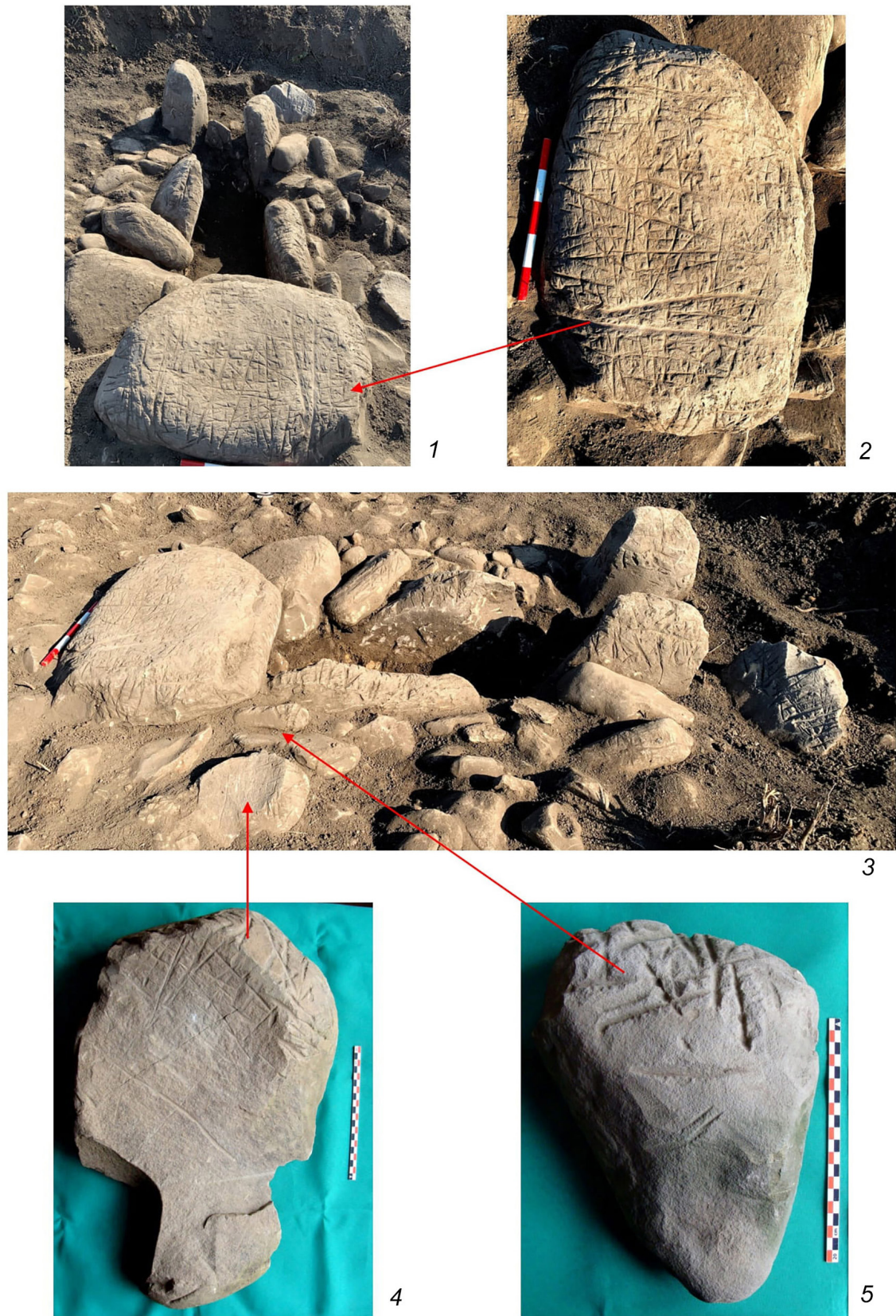


Fig. 4. Amili Kurgan 3. Passage-dromos to the burial chamber and idol stones with cut-in lines

Рис. 4. Амилинский курган № 3. Проход-«дромос» к погребальной камере и камни-идолы с врезными линиями





1



2



3



4

Fig. 5. Amili Kurgan 3. Dolmen-like passage-dromos to the burial chamber (1-3) and vertical stone (4) in the chamber

Рис. 5. Амилинский курган № 3. Дольменоподобный проход-«дромос» к погребальной камере (1-3) и вертикальный камень (4) в камере



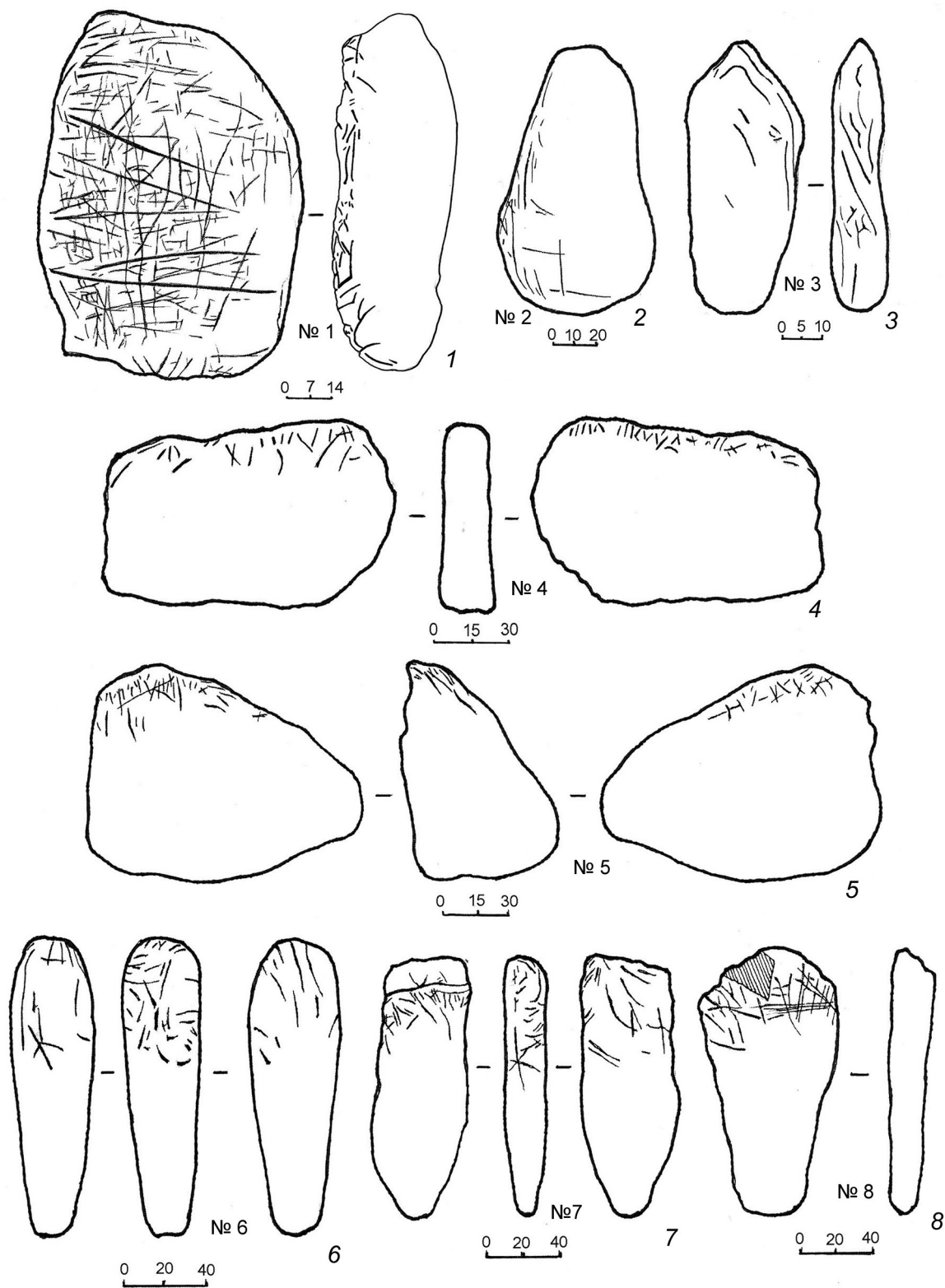


Fig. 6. Amili Kurgan 3. Anthropomorphic idols (1-8) of the passage-dromos

Рис. 6. Амилинский курган № 3. Антропоморфные идолы (№№ 1-8) прохода-«дромоса»

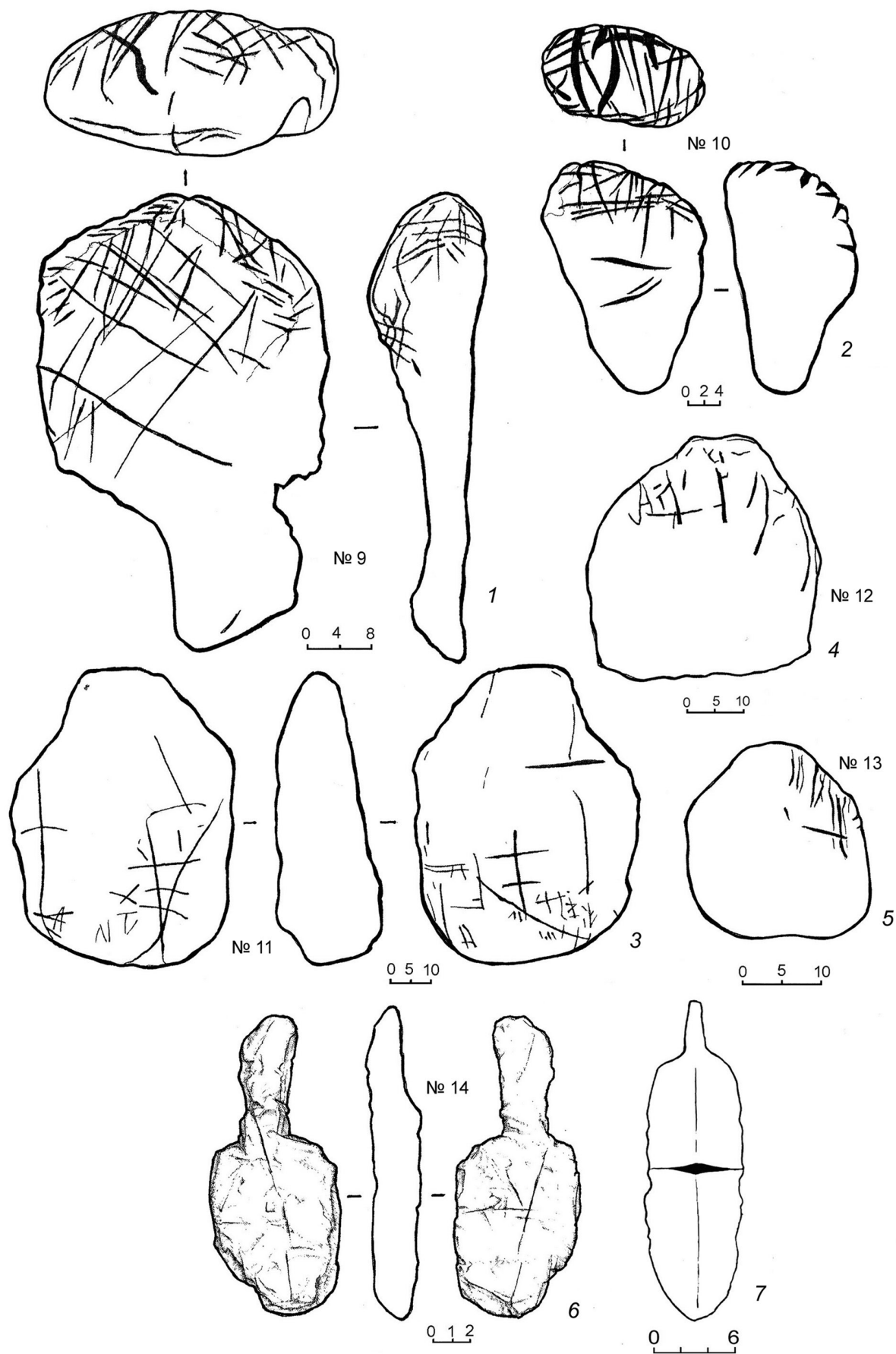


Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic idols from the mound of the Amili Kurgan 3 (1-6 – No. 9-14) and a bronze dagger from the Kishpek Kurgan 1 (7 – according to I.M. Chechenov, 1984)

Рис. 7. Антропоморфные идолы из насыпи Амилинского кургана № 3 (1-6 - №№ 9-14) и бронзовый кинжал из Кишпекского кургана № 1 (7 - по И.М. Чеченову, 1984)

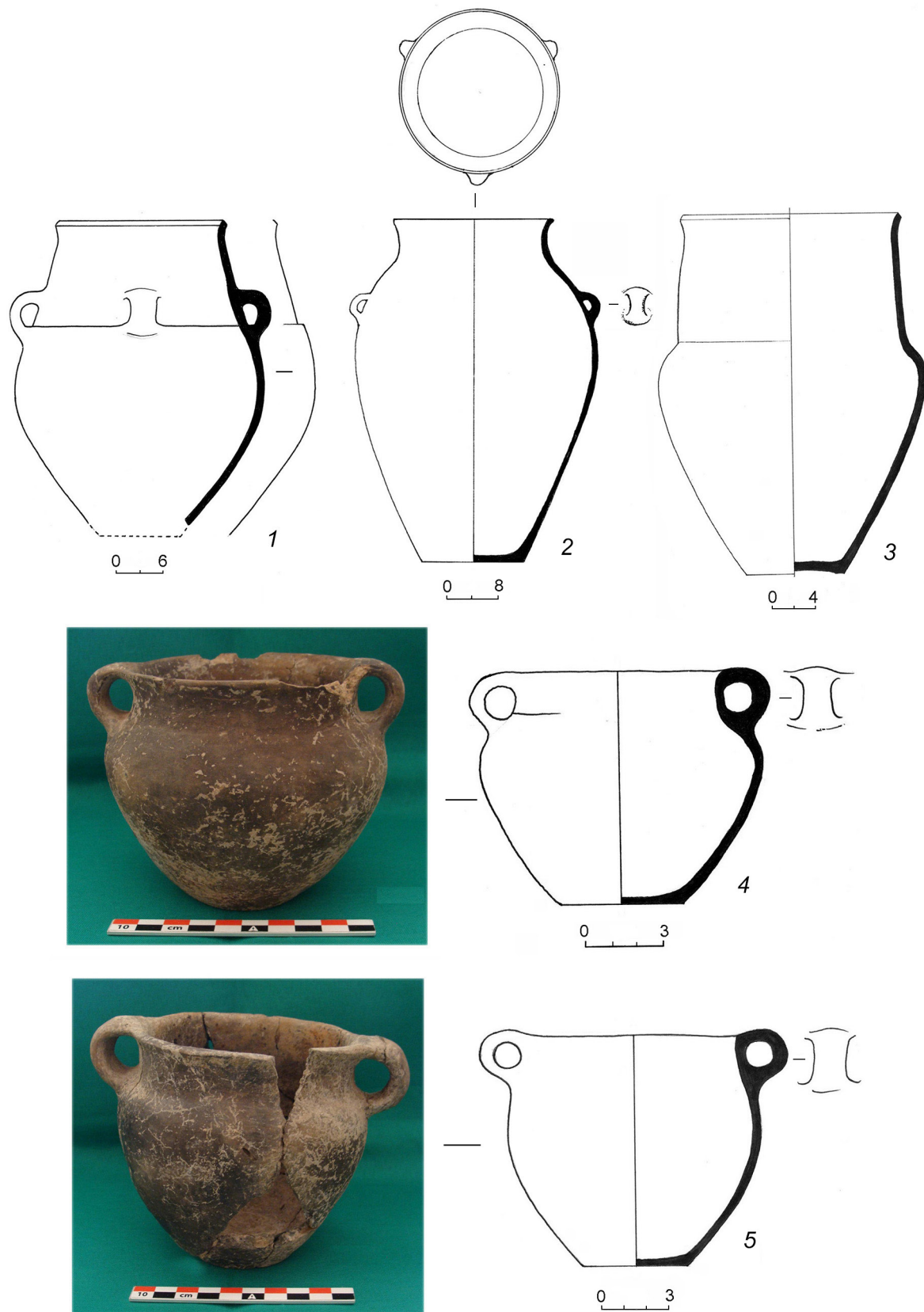


Fig. 8. Amili Kurgan 3. Large containers (1-3) and pot-shaped vessels (4-5)

Рис. 8. Амилинский курган № 3. Крупные тарные (1-3) и горшкообразные сосуды (4-5)





Fig. 9. Amili Kurgan 3. Pot-shaped vessels

Рис. 9. Амилинский курган № 3. Горшкообразные сосуды

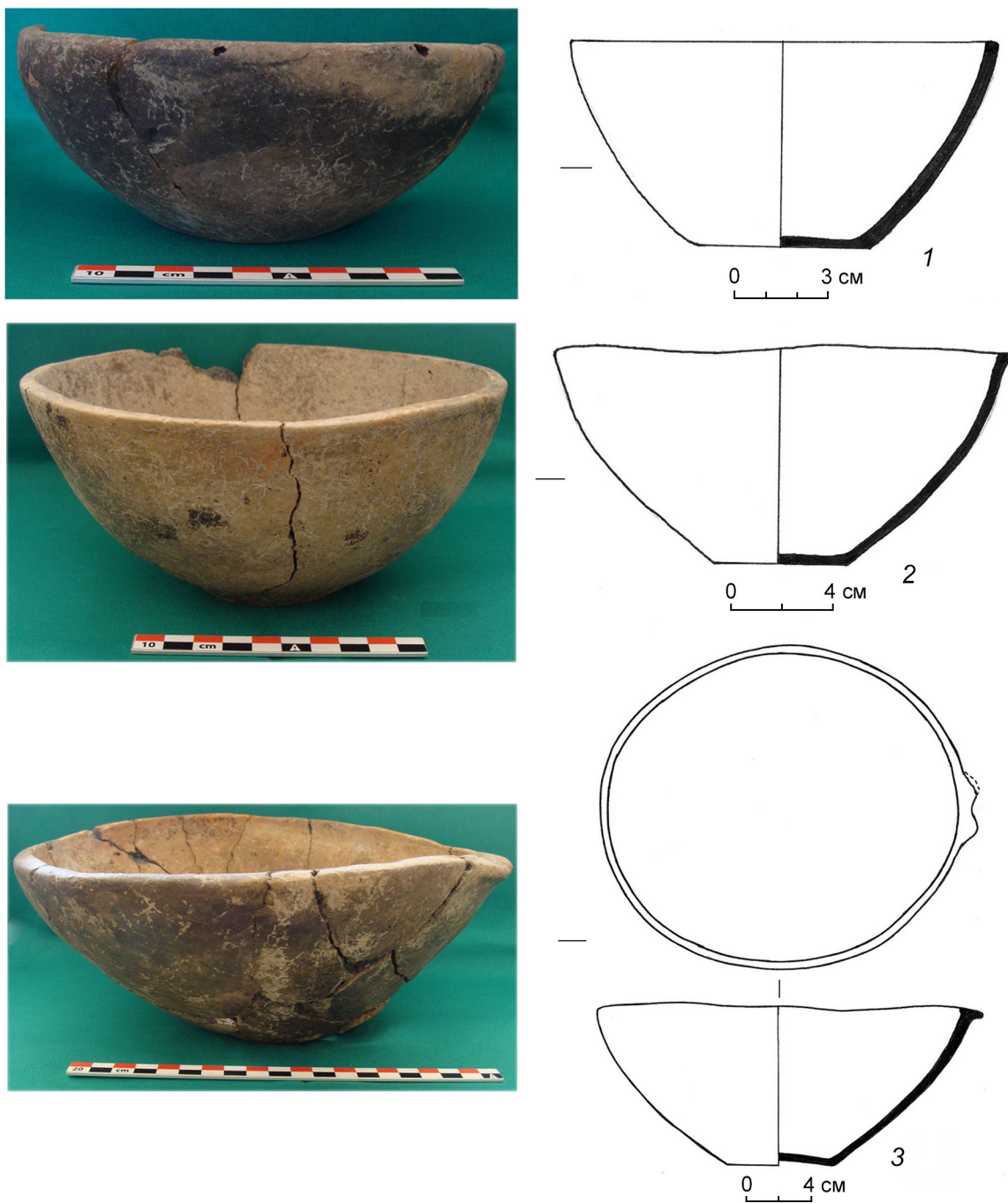


Fig. 10. Amili Kurgan 3. Bowls

Рис. 10. Амилинский курган № 3. Миски

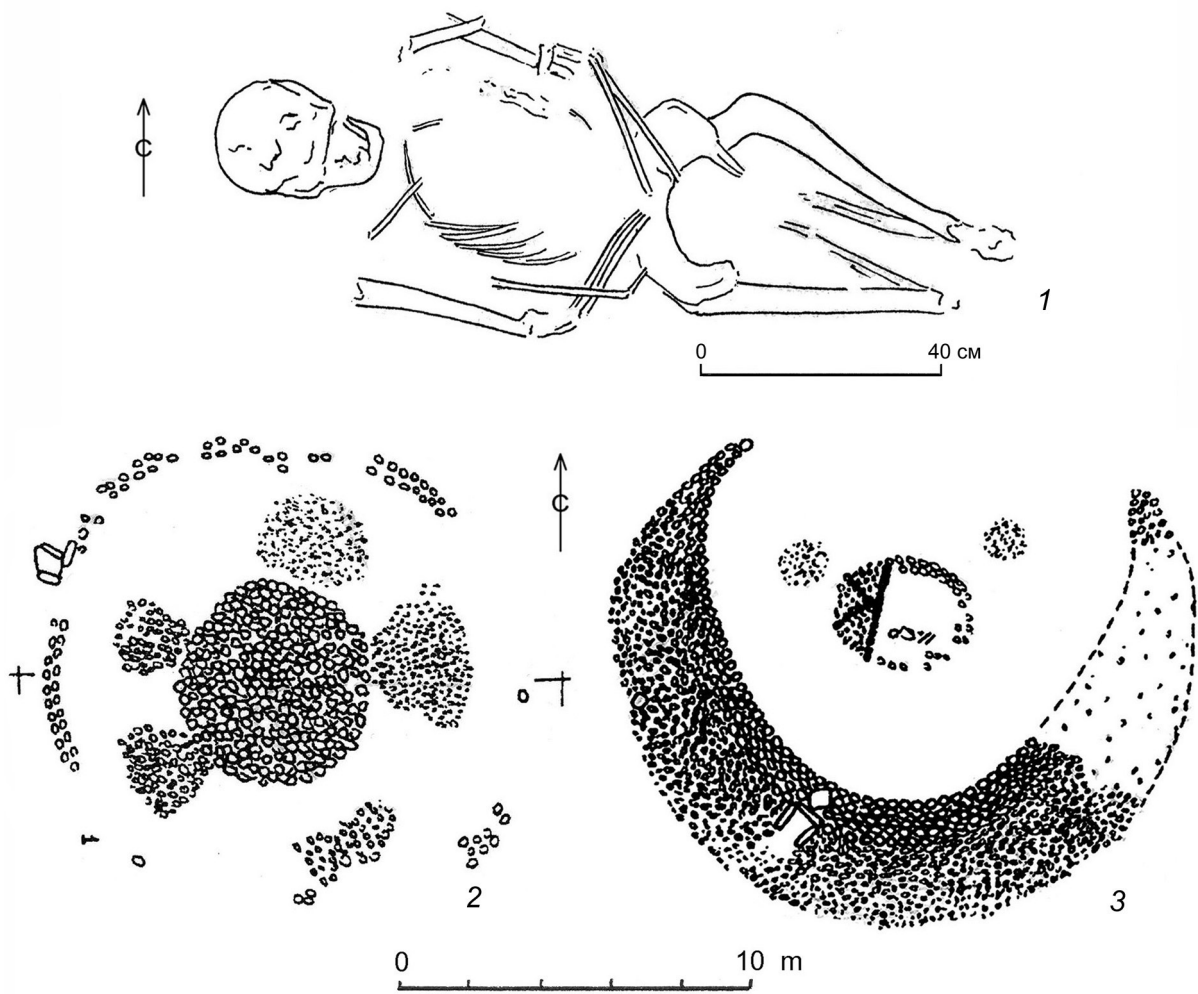


Fig. 11. Kyudurlyu kurgans (according to T.I. Akhundov, 2001)

Рис. 11. Кюдурлинские курганы (по Т.И. Ахундову, 2001)



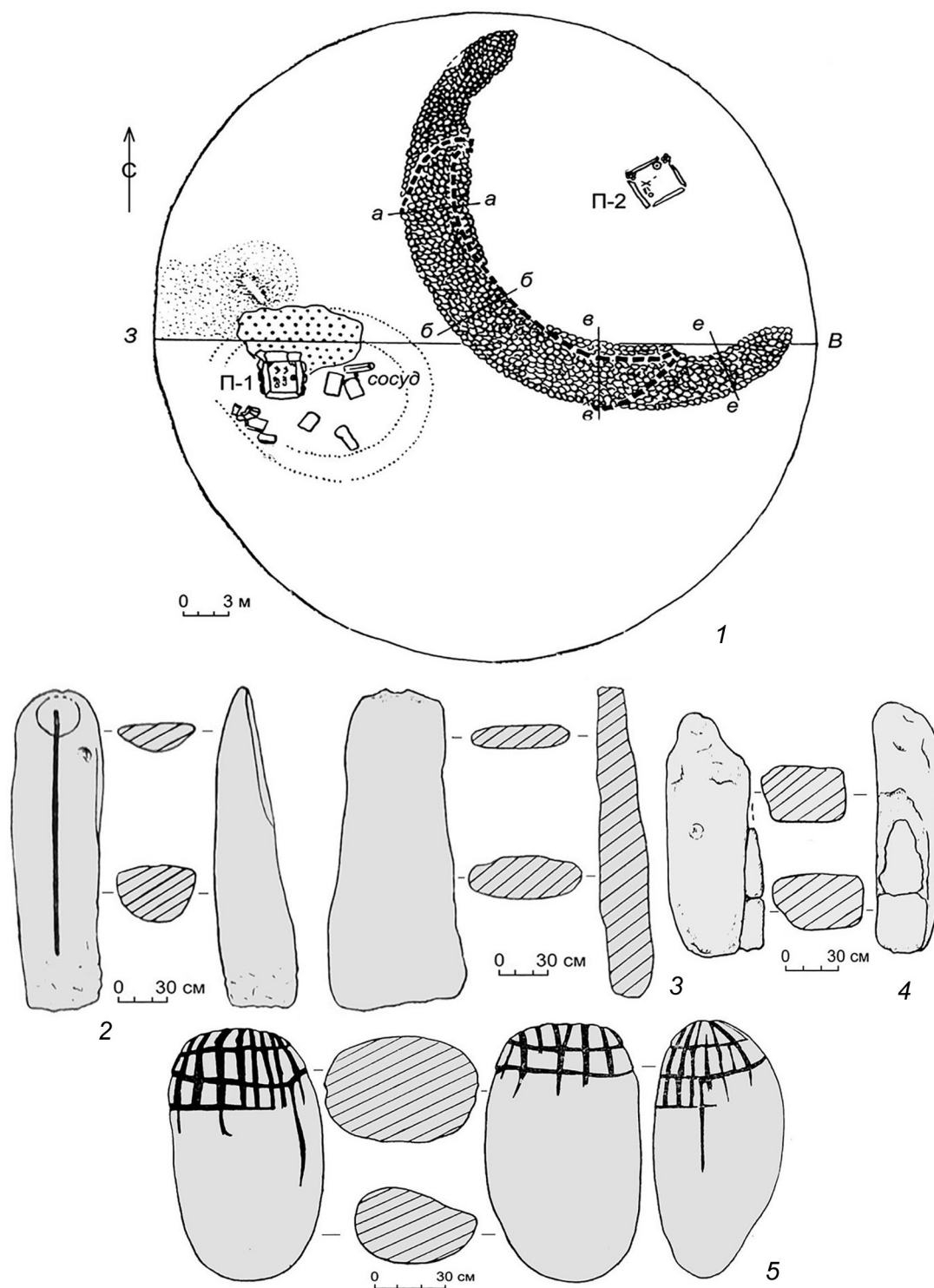


Fig. 12. Kishpek Kurgan 1 with a stone paving in the form of a crescent moon (1), anthropomorphic idols from Kishpek Kurgan 1 (2, 3) and anthropomorphic idols from Nartan kurgan (4, 5) (according to I.M. Chechenov, 1984)

Рис. 12. Кишпекский курган № 1 с каменной выкладкой в виде полумесяца (1), антропоморфные идолы из Кишпекского кургана № 1 (2, 3) и антропоморфные идолы из Нартанского кургана (4, 5) (по И.М. Чеченову, 1984)

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*Received 19.01.2023  
Accepted 30.01.2023  
Published 30.03.2023*

*Поступила в редакцию 19.01.2023  
Принята в печать 30.01.2023  
Опубликована 30.03.2023*