

The Early Bronze Age Complexes of Talin Cemetery

Irene KALANTARIAN*

Abstract: *In this article are examined the kurgans of Talin cemetery of the Early Bronze age. The radiocarbon analyses allow dating these complexes to the end of IV mill. – beginning of III mill. BC. The studied kurgans (N 7, 10, 11, 12) consist of following constructional elements: burial that is encircled by a cromlech, stone shield, stone soil mound, burial chamber and dromos. The researches of Talin necropolis, burial inventory, as well as context of the site enable us to conclude that Kura-Araxes society had quite complicated social structure. Along with permanent settlements there were also mobile communities that practiced animal husbandry. Kura-Araxes community also had trade and cultural interactions with synchronous societies of Central Asia.*

Rezumat: *În acest articol sunt examinate kurganele din cimitirul din epoca bronzului timpuriu de la Talin. Analizele radiocarbon permit încadrarea acestor complexe la sfârșitul mileniului IV BC – începutul mileniului III BC. Kurganele studiate (N 7, 10, 11, 12) constau din următoarele elemente constructive: mormântul care este înconjurat de un cromlech, scut de piatră, movilă de sol și piatră, camera funerară și dromos. Cercetarea necropolei de la Talin, inventarul funerar, ca și contextul sitului ne permit să concluzionăm că societatea Kura-Araxes a avut o structură socială chiar complicată. Alături de așezările permanente existau de asemenea comunități mobile care practicau creșterea animalelor. Comunitatea Kura-Araxes a avut de asemenea schimburi și interacțiuni culturale cu societăți sincrone din Asia Centrală.*

Keywords: *Talin, Kura-Araxes culture, Early Bronze age, Shengavit, burial site, kurgan, cemetery, cromlech, agriculture, animal husbandry.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Talin, cultura Kura-Araxes, epoca bronzului timpuriu, Shengavit, movile funerare, kurgan, cimitir, cromlech, agricultură, creșterea animalelor.*

◆ During the Early Bronze age (half of IV - half of III mill. BC) the territory of Armenia and the surrounding regions were part of a unique culture, known as "Shengavit", "Kura-Araxes", "Early Transcaucasian", "Eastern Anatolian" and for the Syrian-Palestine regions known as culture of "Red-Black burnished Ware", "Kirbet Kerak Ware" (B. Kuftin 1940, p. 20; B. Kuftin 1944, p. 107; C. Burney 1958, p. 157-209; C. Burney, D. Lang 2001, p. 44; W. Lamb 1954, p. 21-32; R. Braidwood, L. Braidwood 1960, p. 356-358; R. Amiran 1965, p. 165-167). Shengavit culture sites are spread either in valleys or subalpine and mountain regions. The sites located in the valleys are not big, occupy from one to 4 ha and are represented by settlements transformed into artificial tells (ash hills).

The subalpine and mountainous sites are located on natural hills, mountain slopes, promontories, formed at the confluence of rivers and often occupy larger territory (from six ha up to few dozens of hectares). The economical basis of Shanegavit society was plugging, irrigative agriculture and pastoral husbandry. The sites excavated in the alpine regions show that societies living in the heights of 2000 m and more have practiced agriculture. Among the tool assemblages used in main fields of economy predominated the examples of bronze: axes, picks, sickles etc. The workshops excavated in various sites, big quantity of the molds for tools and adornments are the best evidences of the level of the metallurgy development.

Since IV mill. BC large groups of population from the region between Kura and Araxes rivers and neighboring regions gradually migrated and invaded new territories. During the second quarter of III mill. BC, the wave of so called "Kura-Araxes expansion" in the south-western direction expanded to the southern parts of Palestine, to Hamadan and Kermanshah in the south-east, and reached Northern Osetia in the north, passing the Caucasian mountains. A great amount of studies is accumulated about the problems of origin, diffusion, chronology of Kura-Araxes culture and the results of various excavations, where the economy of Kura-Araxes society, cultural relations, the main patterns and peculiarities of the development of social environment are described (K. Kushnareva 1997, p. 43-79; T. Kiguradze 2000, p. 321-328; T. Kiguradze, A. Sagona 2003, p. 38-94; P. Kohl 2007).

* Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography Armenia, Yerevan, Charents st. 15; irenkalandarian@mail.ru

In addition to the aforementioned, the new excavations give new data and materials that greatly change the previous viewpoints and conceptions. Particularly, the burials excavated within the territory of Armenia until the 1980's were mainly represented by stone boxes and pit burials: Elar (E. Khanzadyan 1979), Ketik (L. Petrosyan 1989), Harich (T. Khachatryan 1975). In these type of burials there were recorded both individual and group ones. The burial structures with kurgans discovered in the 1980's were not known before and enriched the conceptions about burial ritual of Kura-Araxes culture Maisian (G. Areshyan 1985, p. 494-495; 1986, p. 427-428; 1987, p. 558-559), Berkaber (G. Areshyan, A. Simonyan 1988, p. 469), Jrvezh (G. Tumanyan 1993, p. 7-14), Tsaghkalanj, Talin (R. Badalyan, P. Avetisyan 2007, p. 242-249, 272-275).

The most remarkable among Early Bronze age burial complexes within the territory of Armenia is the kurgan in Talin burial site. Talin cemetery is located at the periphery of the town of Talin, located on the south-western slopes of Mount Aragats, at the altitude of 1600 m. Four of 100 burials excavated here belong to the Early Bronze age. The Early Bronze age complexes were mainly opened in the eastern part of the cemetery.

◆ The burial N7 dated to the early stages of the Early Bronze age is particularly interesting. It is circled by a cromlech of "simple" type (diameter 12 m) that is carefully laid out. The territory, enclosed by cromlech is covered by a stone shield, in its turn covered by stone soil filling. The height of this kurgan consisting of two constructional elements is 0,8 m. The stone box with oval plan is oriented from south-east to north-west by its longitudinal axis. It is built of vertical orthostatic stones.

The burial had stone dromos from south-eastern side which leads to the chamber. The part adjoining to the dromos is sealed with stones. The cover of the burial was not preserved, despite the one-row false vault built for its preservation. The sizes of the burial are: 2,3 x 1,2 x 1,4 m, sizes of dromos – 3,4 x 0,7 m (pl. I, fig. 1-3). Inside the chamber the skeletal remains of eight humans were discovered. The direction of the remains indicated the existence of periodic burials inside the chamber, whereby earlier burial remains were moved to make room for a new one. Furthermore, skeletal remains of approximately ten animals (sheep and goats) were found in the chamber (fig. 4).

The burial inventory consists of 2 vessels (fig. 15/12, 16). Most probably the burial was made also in the "dromos" (during the excavation of the dromos, in the northern part of it, several badly preserved skeleton bones and teeth were recorded). A few shards of ceramics, obsidian flakes and animal bones were also found.

◆ The kurgan N10 was built on the top of a natural hill (diameter from east to the west 25 m, from north to south 21 m). It is circled by a cromlech, with only western part preserved. Two rows of orthostatic stones (20 m wide and 40 m long) are attached to the filling of kurgan from the eastern part. That leaves an impression of the "road" leading to the burial. In the center of the kurgan there is a ground chamber (pl. II; fig. 5, 5a). Pure clay (clay mortar) was laid around (11 m diameter and 1 m height). The whole area encircled by the cromlech along with the clay filling is covered by a stone shield, in its turn covered by stone soil filling. The height of this kurgan, consisting of three elements, is 1,2 m. The cist (2,1 x 2 x 1 m) on the ground surface was constructed in the center of the clay mound and encircled by the second cromlech made by small, flat slab like stones, with the diameter of 7,5 m. The chamber was oriented southwest- northeast. The bone remains belonged to nine individuals and were found scattered inside the chamber (fig. 6-8). The burials used to have 2 layers. The upper one was destroyed because of later burials. Two layers of the burials were separated by tile floor. The skeleton remains opened in the lower layer were also put on the tile floor. Seemingly random position of the skeleton bones let us conclude that burials were made periodically in both layers with certain intervals.

The bones of different kind of livestock found scattered in the whole chamber. Beside the large amount of ceramic fragments recovered there were bronze points, sardonyx and paste made beads (fig. 15/5, 13).

◆ The mound of the kurgan N11 (1,1 m height, 20 m diameter.) also had stone soil composition. There was a shield of small stones under it. There is no cromlech recorded around the kurgan. The ground, oval in plan burial chamber (sizes 2,1 x 2,4 x 1,5 m) was built of flat stone flags put one on each other. The slabs of the upper row were put a little forward that leaves an impression of false vault. The chamber is longitudinally oriented from south-east to north-west. It also had a "dromos" oriented from south-east to north-west attached to the edge of the mound (sizes 6,2 x 0,6 x 0,6 m). With its constructional details this kurgan resembles the kurgan N 7 that was described above. The only difference is that the burial chamber is ground based and does not have a cromlech (pl. III; fig. 9, 10). The kurgan from Jrvezh can be represented as a parallel (G. Tumanyan 1993, p. 7-13).

Moreover, unlike the previous ones, here the deceased were not moved and preserved in anatomical position.

The chamber was filled with a 30 cm layer of soil prior to the burial. The skeletal remains of five humans were found inside the chamber, two of which were well preserved. The next two had been interred on the left side in a "foetal" position, facing the west. The third skeleton lay on the back; its feet were disturbed (fig. 11). Among the large amount of fragmented pottery there were beads made of paste as well as a stone mace head and bronze spiral-ring jewellery (fig. 15/1, 10).

The kurgan N 12 was built on a separate, small hill. The mound (height 0,7 m) is without a cromlech and consists of the stone soil filling with ceramic shards and obsidian flakes. The diameter of the mound is 13 m. It covers the ground-like rectangular construction with a complex plan that is longitudinally oriented from south-east to north-west. The burial structure is unique. It reminds a "labirint" consisting of corridors separated by two-rowed and three-rowed walls from three sides and it ends with ground with disorderly filled stones (pl. IV; fig. 12, 13).

The burial was recorded in the central part of this platform. There were skull and extremities bones, the orientation of which is an evidence of ritual dissection (fig. 14). There was a complete vessel found near the skeleton remains as well as numerous shards, obsidian arrow head. During the excavation of the platform and corridors big amount of ceramics shards, obsidian flakes, 2 groundstones, treated stones, bone hair-pin, flint arrow head, bronze handle with a hole, flat bladed spear head and part of the blade of the dagger were found (fig. 15/ 2-4, 6-9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 21).

The ceramics found from Talin burials repeat the examples typical of Kura-Araxes earliest complexes by its morpho-technological parameters and ornamentations. The radiocarbon data (tab. 1) allows us to date these complexes to the end of IV mill. BC - beginning of III mill. BC.

	ID Lab.	Date BP	Cal.BC (2σ)
Burial 10	R – 2627	4230±58	3019-2885
Burial 11	R – 2628	4448±52	3330-2936

Tab. 1. Radiocarbon Laboratory, Universita "La Sapienza", Rome, Italy.
Laboratorul de radiocarbon, Universitatea "La Sapienza", Roma, Italia.

It's remarkable that there was no Early Bronze age settlement recorded neighboring to Talin burial site. The burials with the same constructional features were excavated in Maisian and Jrvezh, where no neighboring settlements were fixed as well. The presence of the burial sites which are not associated with settlements allows concluding that Kura-Araxes society had quite complicated social structure. It can be argued, that along with the communities that built permanent settlements and practiced agriculture, there were also mobile communities, moving from one place to another, that predominantly practiced animal husbandry.

It is also noteworthy that from Talin burial N 11 a head adornment made of tin bronze was found (Kh. Meliksetyan *et alii* 2003, p. 597-606). There was a viewpoint before that the bronze artifacts with tin alloy appear in Transcaucasus from the end of III mill. BC and are typical of Middle Bronze age sites. Besides, the analyses of bronze daggers found from Talin show that the sources of raw materials are beyond the borders of Armenian Highland and most probably originate from Central Asia. The vessel fragment with a relief decoration of a camel found from "cult platform" opened in Talin burial site suggests that the society that created that cemetery had trade and cultural relations with synchronous societies of Central Asia.

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Fig. 1. Talin, tomb 7.
Talin, mormântul 7.



Fig. 2. Talin, tomb 7.
Talin, mormântul 7.



Fig. 3. Talin, tomb 7.
Talin, mormântul 7.



Fig. 4. Talin, tomb 7.
Talin, mormântul 7.



Fig. 5. Talin, tomb 10.
Talin, mormântul 10.



Fig. 5a. Talin, tomb 10.
Talin, mormântul 10.



Fig. 6. Talin, tomb 10.
Talin, mormântul 10.

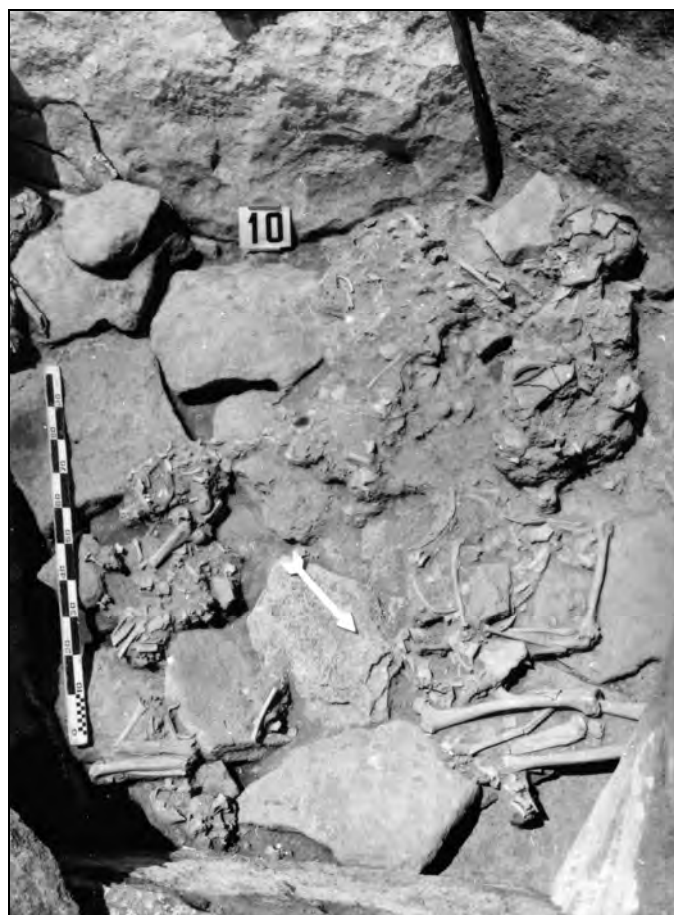


Fig. 7. Talin, tomb 10.
Talin, mormântul 10.



Fig. 8. Talin, tomb 10.
Talin, mormântul 10.



Fig. 9. Talin, tomb 11.
Talin, mormântul 11.



Fig. 10. Talin, tomb 11.
Talin, mormântul 11.



Fig. 11. Talin, tomb 11.
Talin, mormântul 11.



Fig. 12. Talin, tomb 12.
Talin, mormântul 12.



Fig. 13. Talin, tomb 12.
Talin, mormântul 12.



Fig. 14. Talin, tomb 12.
Talin, mormântul 12.

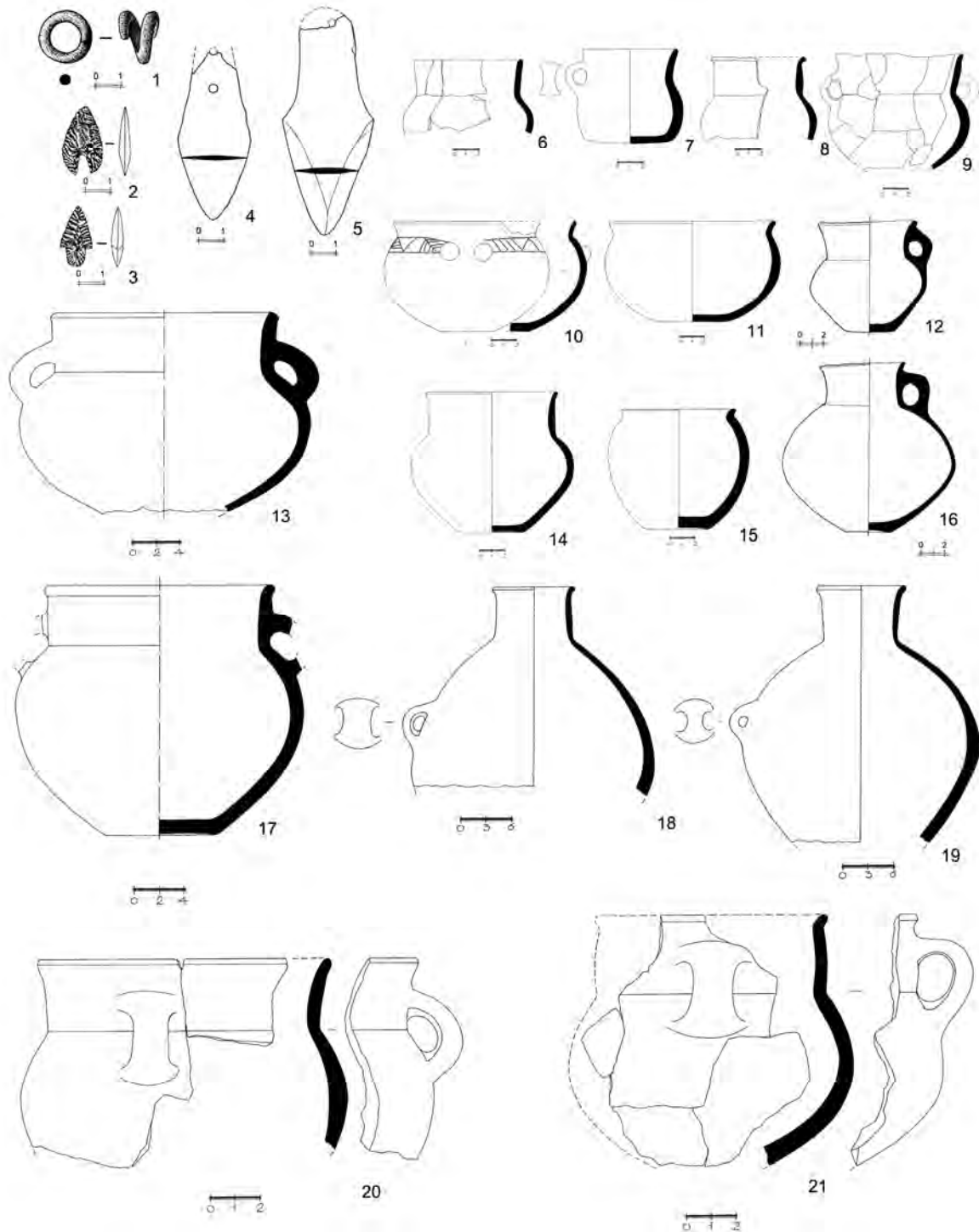
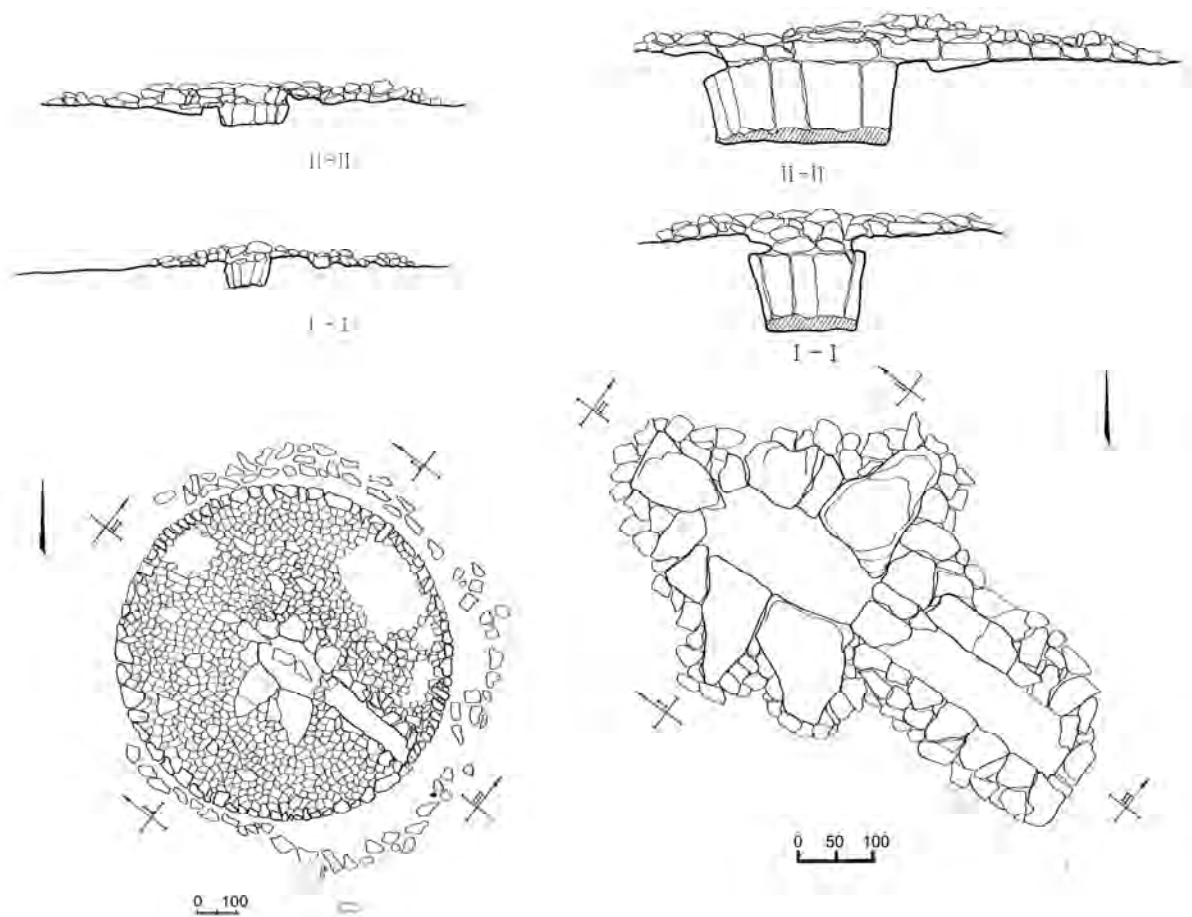
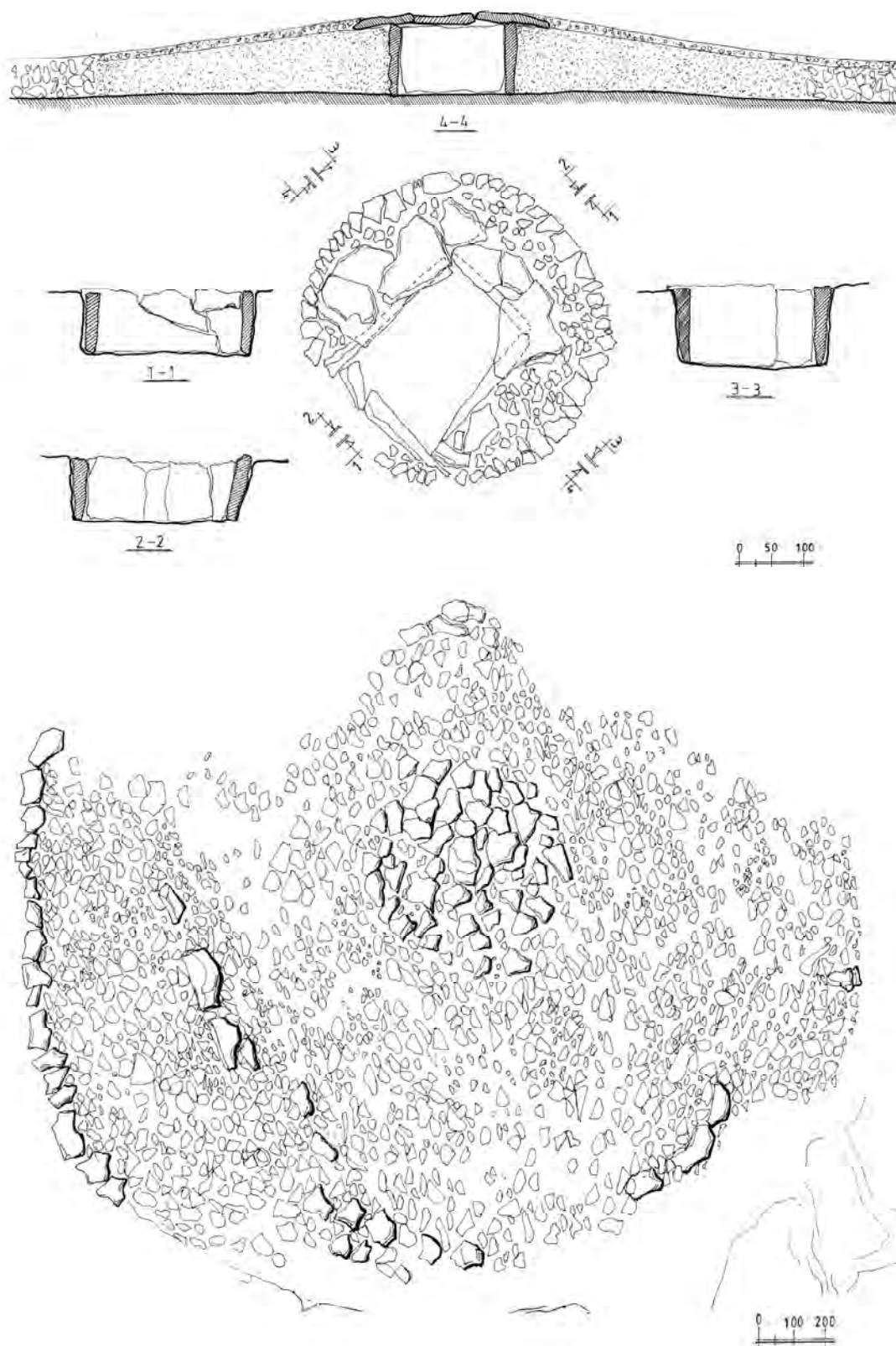


Fig. 15. 12, 16 tomb 7; 5, 13 tomb 10; 1, 10 tomb 11; 2-4, 6-9, 11, 15, 20, 21 tomb 12 (scale in cm).

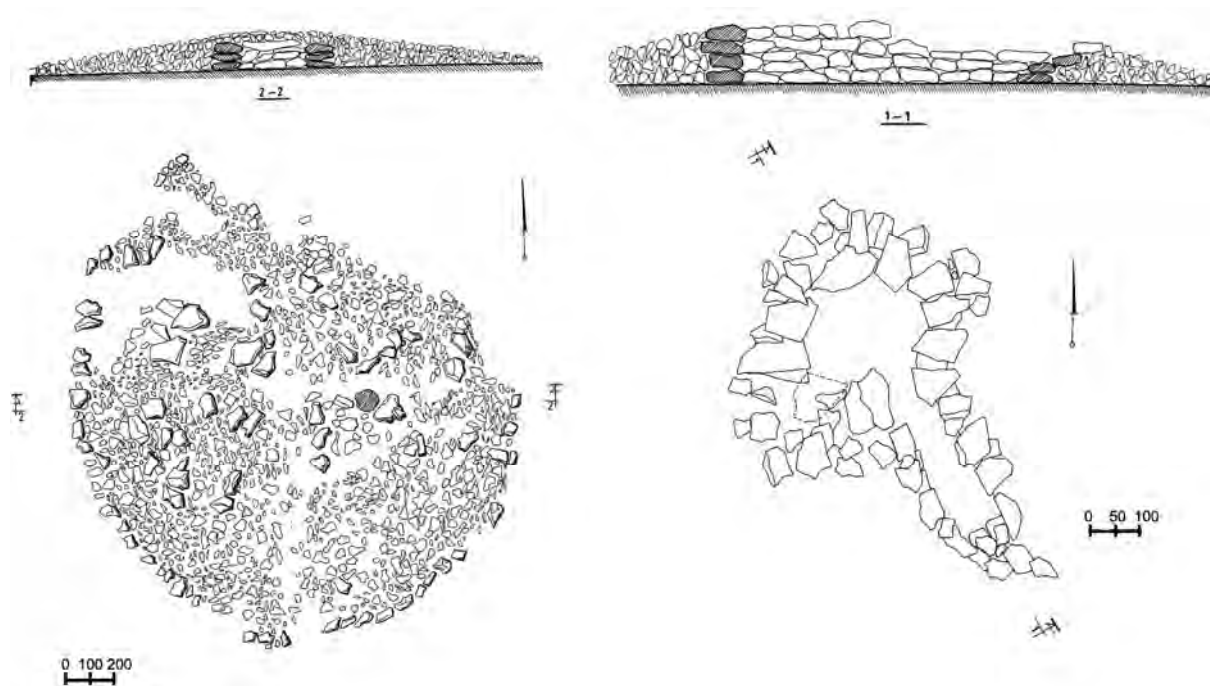
12, 16 mormântul 7; 5, 13 mormântul 10; 1, 10 mormântul 11; 2-4, 6-9, 11, 15, 20, 21 mormântul 12 (scara în cm).



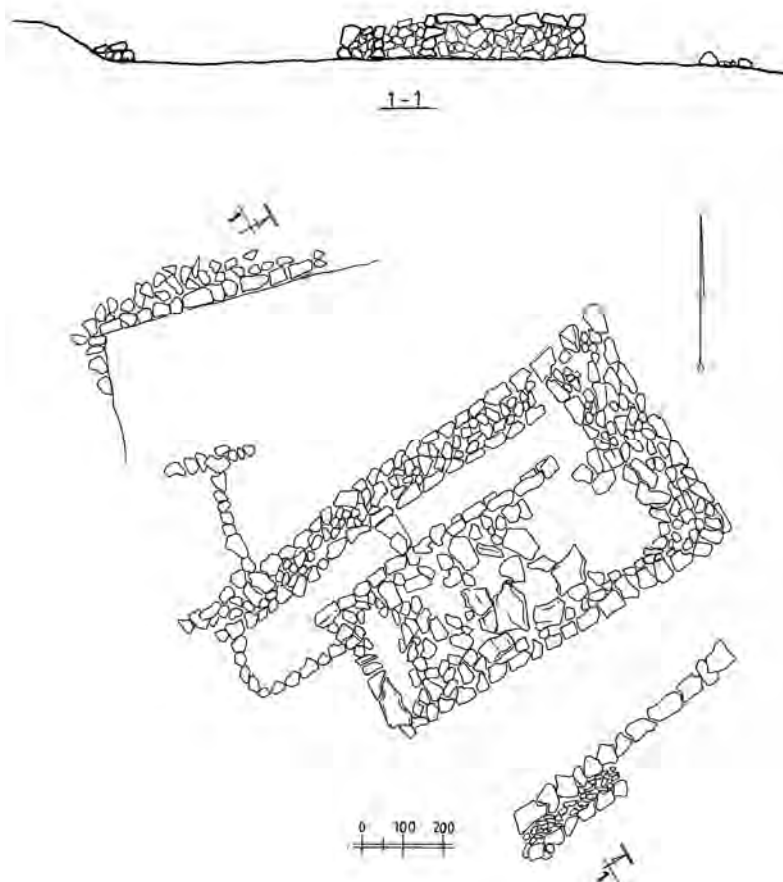
Pl. I. Talin, tomb 7 (scale in cm).
Talin, tomb 7 (scara în cm).



Pl. II. Talin, tomb 10 (scale in cm).
Talin, tomb 10 (scara în cm).



Pl. III. Talin, tomb 11 (scale in cm).
Talin, tomb 11 (scara în cm).



Pl. IV. Talin, tomb 12 (scale in cm).
Talin, tomb 12 (scara în cm).