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Gravestones with Georgian Inscriptions from the High Medieval Period at Dmanisi, Georgia

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Introduction

According to the historical and archaeological materials present today, some gravestones with Georgian epitaphs have been dated to the high medieval period (the 11th-14th centuries AD). Gravestones dating to this period are quite rare, but there are a few existing examples including Rustavi, the village of Vardzagari in the Dmanisi municipality, Gelati, and others [Chilashvili 1958:148-149; Berdzenishvili 1998:69-72; Silogava 2000:26; 153, picture 9; 164, photo 24]¹. Previous researchers have contributed varying explanations regarding the scarcity of these discoveries. Some scholars argue that the paucity of these particular gravestones are a result of changing burial rites from individual burials to collective burials, where the early medieval tombs were often re-opened due to the illogicality of having a monument for one person [Lomtadze 1977:74; Nadiradze 2001:106]. Other scholars suggest that Georgians did not have a tradition of engraving dedications on gravestones until the late medieval period, which also explains the absence of Georgian inscriptions from the earlier period at Dmanisi, where there are gravestones with Arabic and Armenian inscriptions [Muskhelishvili 1938:441].

1 Memorial epigraphic monuments excavated near an Orthodox church dated to the 12th-13th centuries AD in the territory of Lore in modern Armenia, a historical province of Georgia, are an exception. [Մուրադյան 1966: 30-48; Jojua, Gagoshidze 2012-2013].

This article discusses two gravestones with Georgian inscriptions discovered at Dmanisi and the original field documents associated with the findings.² Our aim is to analyze topological and chronological aspects of these monuments. We hope this research will be innovative in the study of high medieval gravestones and inscriptions.

The Medieval City of Dmanisi

Dmanisi is a multilayer archaeological site with three main periods: early Paleolithic, a Late Bronze-Early Iron Age settlement, and the medieval city. The latter, with rich archaeological, historical, and architectural remains, will be the focus of this article.

The fortified portion of the medieval city of Dmanisi covers 13 hectares and is located on a high, volcanic promontory at the confluence of the Mashavera and Pinezauri Rivers (fig. 1). The cemetery covers 25 hectares and is located on the slope of a mountain to the south of the citadel and some fortifications. One of the suburbs in the north-west part of the city is located in the Mashavera River ravine and consists of about ten rock-cut dwellings distributed in four lines on the terrace. Three public bath complexes have been discovered in the southeastern part of the city, which is now the modern village of Patara Dmanisi. Considering Dmanisi's proximity to the ancient caravan route, caravanserais and other trade centers likely existed within the city's surrounding area.

Although ruins are all that is left of the medieval city of Dmanisi, it is still possible to distinguish its main structures: 1) fortification system, which includes the citadel, city walls and the gate, and a secret tunnel, 2) different urban areas, with different religious and ethnic groupings and production zones, 3) suburbs, including dwellings, a trade center, and both production and public places, 4) the cemetery, and 5) the expanded economic district that includes villages attached to the city.

Previous archaeological excavations have confirmed the existence of an urban-type settlement in Dmanisi during the early medieval period (the 4th-10th centuries AD.) [Kopaliani, 1996:62-63; Джапаридзе, 1980:272-273]. The formation of the city and the construction of the Dmanisi fortress both date to the 9th century AD. Dmanisi appears as a city in written sources around

2 We had planned to publish research about the issue earlier, but we did not have enough material at our disposal. Since archaeological reports would not give us the opportunity to illustrate the issue thoroughly, we have discussed gravestones with Georgian inscriptions only in general in our paper regarding the Dmanisi cemetery [Chkhvimiani 2009].

the same period, namely in *Matiane Kartlisai* (History of Georgia) [Kartlis Tskhovreba 1955:257]. The city belonged to the Arabs during the first phase of its development (9th-11th centuries AD), followed by the Armenian kingdom of Tashir-Dzoraget [Kutateladze 2001:102], and then the Seljuk Turks. During the reign of David the Builder (1089-1125 AD), Dmanisi became a royal city of Georgian kings [Kartlis Tskhovreba 1955:340-344] who appointed an emir to run the city [Berdzenishvili 1964:751]. In the second phase of the city (12th-14th centuries), Dmanisi became an important strategic location that was part of the Georgian kingdom's border defense system [Kopaliani 2002:43-44]. Because of being involved in the united trade and economic system of the Georgian Kingdom, Dmanisi reached the peak of its development during this period. Dmanisi had intensive trade interactions with the outer world [Iakut 1964:57], mainly because of its location on important trade crossroads [Japaridze 1998:19-37].

According to archaeological material, trade was one of the well-developed sectors of Dmanisi's economy. In addition to trade, production of glazed and unglazed ceramics [Mitsishvili 1969:69-71], glass [Chkhatarashvili 1978:39; Джапаридзе, Копалиани, Мгеладзе, Гочиашвили, Болквадзе, Бугианишвили 1987:115-117], metal, textiles, leather [Kereselidze 1978:13-17], and olive oil [Japaridze 1969:69] were integral to Dmanisi's livelihood. Dmanisi also had its own mint, where copper coins were produced ["Money in Georgia" 2000:54; Jalaghania, Japaridze 1987:20]. There was a growth in population during the city's second phase of development and Dmanisi transitioned into an eastern Georgian multi-ethnic city, based on the emergence of Islamic graves, having gravestones with both Arabic [Kakhiani 1960; Japaridze 1984:18-27] and Armenian inscriptions [Melikset-Beg 1954:158-161]. Also, the erection of Armenian chapels and Islamic mosques and schools (madrasas) alongside Georgian churches reflect major demographic changes in the city's population [Melikset-Beg 1954:158-161; Kakhiani 1960; Japaridze 1984:18-27; Chkhvimiani 2011:217-218].

The city was devastated by Tamerlane's invasions at the end of the 14th century and from this time until the 18th century, Dmanisi is mentioned in written sources not as a city, but as a fortress with a little village-type settlement reconstructed by the feudal Baratashvili family. This is confirmed by a 17th-century inscription on a kvevri (a large earthen vessel for storing wine) mentioning the Dmanisi central cathedral as a "village church" [Kopaliani 1998:81].

Archaeological investigations at the city of Dmanisi commenced in the 1930s, were resumed in the 1960s, and continue today. As a result, many of the artifacts and monuments have been restored and have proven to be im-

portant contributions to our knowledge of the history of Georgian medieval cities. Gravestones with Georgian inscriptions are among these important discoveries.

The City Cemetery

As mentioned above, the cemetery at Dmanisi covers a vast territory (approximately 25 hectares) and is adjacent to the city on the south side (fig. 2). Many graves dating from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age have been discovered at the lower level of this area [Джапаридзе, Копалиани, Бугианишвили, Болквадзе, Гочиашвили, Мгеладзе, Абрамишвил 1991:108]. These graves are associated with a settlement from the same period that was discovered at the same stratigraphic level within the territory of the city [Rezesidze 2011:36-52]. There are also early medieval graves at the Dmanisi cemetery, which are from the period before the urbanization of Dmanisi. [Джапаридзе, 1980:273]. The portion of the cemetery connected to the high medieval period of Dmanisi is situated on several rows of the terraces. There are also graves belonging to the late medieval period within the same area [Japaridze, Artilakva 1971:65-66]. According to memorial monuments and burial practices, the high medieval period portion of the cemetery consists of two sections – Christian and Muslim. The Christian tombs belonged to the Georgian and Armenian populations of Dmanisi.

The Islamic memorial monuments are typically flat, stele-shaped gravestones, often with triangular heads and carved inscriptions on the eastern face. These kinds of gravestones are sometimes set in specially cut sockets on rectangularly-formed flat pedestals [Japaridze 1984:20]. Also present are sarcophagus-like stones lined horizontally with double-sided surfaces and prism-shaped projections having four or five facets and Arabic inscriptions on the southern and northern portions.

There are more than ten mausoleums on the grounds of the Dmanisi cemetery, all of which have domes standing on a trumpet arch. The mausoleums themselves have different, overall structures however. Some mausoleums are quadrangular, square-shaped structures that are similar to the others, but with flattened corners on the exterior, while others are circular-shaped with six or eight facets [Muskhelishvili 1938:431-432; Chkhvimiani 2009:336-337]. Within the mausoleums, the pit-graves are roofed with slabs that have triangular brick arches. The graves are oriented from east to west and the deceased are buried in the supine position, with the head to the west and the face turned towards the south (Muslims are buried so that they face Mecca, therefore south

serves as the primary direction for the Dmanisi Muslim burials). The hands of the deceased lay on the body with a hand placed on the stomach or close to the chin [Japaridze 1972:52-55].

The bulk of Christian graves in the Dmanisi cemetery, both Georgian and Armenian, consist of pit graves roofed with slabs, though there are also cist tombs. Those pit graves not lined with slabs would have instead been covered with logs, the traces of which are not visible today. The bodies are in the supine position with an east-west orientation, where the head is to the west and the hands usually lay on the chest. These types of graves had stele made of flat, rounded, or quadrangular stones with a variety of decorated crosses primarily lacking inscriptions. The remaining graves are represented by a variation of different styles. Some horizontally-lined gravestones shaped like sarcophagi with double-sided surfaces are present, with many having depictions of false arches along their sides representing the roof of a church. Horizontally-oriented stones similar to the Muslim gravestones have occasionally been set on a flat pedestal. Other gravestones are precisely carved stones in rectangular, oval, stele-like, or stone cross shapes, the latter of which sometimes resemble Armenian “Khachkars.”

Although the majority of the medieval burials at Dmanisi do not contain grave goods, some grave goods are present (some of which are from the burials of children in both the Christian and Muslim sectors of the cemetery). The grave goods are mostly personal adornments, such as metal and glass bracelets, beads of different shapes and material, including agate, amber, sardonyx, glass, glazed ceramic, and silver, and earrings and rings of iron, glass, and silver, along with other materials. Overall, pottery and household objects are quite rare among the grave goods. [Gochiashvili 1986:52].

Saint Tevdore, a single nave church, is located in the cemetery and is associated with Christian burial rites and the commemoration of the dead [Chkhvimiani 2009:340]. Two other small hall churches were discovered in the cemetery and probably had the function of dynastic eukterions, where only members of one family were buried [Джапаридзе... 1987:109].

Three different studies date the gravestones with Arabic and Armenian inscriptions to the 13th-14th centuries AD (Крачковская 1951:21-32; Melikset-Beg 1954:158-161; Kakhiani 1965). In contrast to the Arabic and Armenian inscriptions, we know almost nothing about the contemporaneous memorial monuments with Georgian inscriptions. Some general information regarding the discovery of stele with Georgian inscriptions can be found in archaeological reports from 1977 and 1986 [Джапаридзе 1980:273; Джапаридзе...

1991:108], but these burials have never been subjected to any typological, stylistic, or paleographic research.

Currently, there are very few instances of graves bearing Georgian inscriptions at archaeological sites dating to the high medieval period³. Therefore, this paper offers further evidence contributing to the growing number of graves with Georgian inscriptions during this period and is an important step towards understanding the human agency behind this burial tradition.

Excavations of Trench V ⁴

Since the cemetery was discovered, archaeologists were very interested in the south part of the cemetery, which contains parallelogram-shaped stones visible on the surface and were undoubtedly Christian memorial gravestones (fig. 3). Trench V was opened in 1976 with a 5x6 m excavation. Based on the recovered gravestones, archaeologists determined that there were 11 graves in the trench (fig. 4). Graves №5 and №6 were of particular interest (figs. 5-6), because a tombstone with Georgian inscriptions was unearthed near grave №5, but is potentially related to both burials [Japaridze 1976:11, table XVIII-XIX].⁵ Grave №1 included a skeleton of a small child alongside an adult skeleton. A copper coin of Tamar and David minted in 1200 AD was found close to the adult's cranium [Джапаридзе, Гамбашидзе 1979:213-214].

In 1977, further excavations expanded trench V and uncovered four more gravestones, bringing the total to 15 [Джапаридзе 1978:483].⁶ In addition to the gravestones, fragments of two individuals without gravestones were found.⁷ Overall, 20 individuals were found in trench V, and the majority of them were from the upper level – 2.25-2.50 m. from the surface (fig. 8). One grave containing grave goods was discovered in the lower level – 3.0 m. from the surface (fig. 9).⁸ The grave goods associated with this burial include a pin

3 This understanding is largely based on the lack of previously known material, and new discoveries support arguments contending that depictions of epitaphs on gravestones were a tradition in the High Middle Ages [Lanchava...2011]. With this in mind, there is a good chance of discovering new finds that can inform further on this issue.

4 M. Gochiashvili ran the archaeological excavations at the cemetery.

5 Grave 5 is mistakenly labeled as 7 in the 1976 report, which is contrary to the 1976 plan map and the 1977 report, where both refer to the grave as 5.

6 According to the archival material, small excavations in trench V were also conducted in 1978.

7 Supposedly, we have partial individual graves and a burial rite in case of some human remains.

8 This grave number was mislabeled in the previous site reports and the corrected number is given here, 14.

with a pomegranate-shaped head and some beads that both date to the 4th-5th centuries AD. [Джапаридзе 1980:272-273]. Of the 20 graves, 19 were pit graves and one, 14, was a cist tomb (fig. 7-9).

The details of archived material from the excavations has been presented below to demonstrate the typology and chronology of the Georgian portion of the Dmanisi cemetery uncovered in trench V.

Grave 1 – pit grave (fig. 8), roofed with the slab. A child skeleton in poor condition was found 1.40 m below the surface.⁹ The deceased was buried in the supine position with the head towards the west and the hands placed on the stomach. The adult individual was found 1.55 m below the surface, and the copper coin of Queen Tamar was under his/her skull. Another coin of the same type was found near the same grave, at 2.10 m from the surface [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:1]. Based on their placement and depth, the adult individual was buried in grave 1 first, followed by the child, and they were perhaps members of the same family (parent and child). Based on the date of the copper coin discovered at the head of the adult (minted by Tamar and David in 1200), the grave can be attributed to the 1st half of the 13th century. [Джапаридзе, Гамбашидзе 1979:213-214].

Grave 2 – pit grave (fig. 10) with pebbles on the surface. The poorly preserved skeleton was laid in the supine position and oriented from the south-west to the North-East. It was found 1.80 m below the surface. The only grave good present was one metal temple ring (field № 03-2-77-3; Fig. 23, Item 5) [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:2].

The location assigned the number three had no grave.

Grave 4 – pit grave (image 8) roofed with slabs (1.50x0.95 meter). The adult skeleton was in the supine position, oriented in a east-west direction with the head pointing west and the hands placed on the stomach. It was found at a depth of 2.52 m below the surface. Another adult skeleton in a similar position was found in this grave (№4a) (fig. 11)¹⁰ at a depth of 2.78 m below the surface. This grave did not contain any grave goods [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:2].

Grave 7 – pit grave (fig. 13), roofed over with flat, knurled-surfaced slabs (1.60x0.48 m) and oriented from the east to the west. Two individuals are present in this grave and are buried on top of one another. One of them (№7) was found 2.50 m below the surface. The skeleton was in the supine position with the head to the west and the hands were placed on the stomach and the legs

9 Due to discrepancies in the burial depth between the original archaeological reports and plans, this study measures the depths from a specific benchmark; thus, only the corrected depths are reported.

10 According to the archaeological report and grave plans, the human remains labeled №4 and №4a were buried on top of one another.

were bent. The second individual (№7a) was found 2.70 m below the surface and was also in the supine position with the head to the west and hands on the stomach. No grave goods were recovered in this grave [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:2].

According to the drawing, a third skeleton had been found between skeletons №7a and №8a 2.70 m below the surface, and was labeled №7b [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:Table IV, picture 2].¹¹

Grave 8 – pit grave (fig. 14). Unlike the other graves, this one had a well-dressed, rectangular, sarcophagus-shaped, double-sided, roof-style gravestone. An equilateral cross was depicted as resting on a two-step pedestal on the western facade of the horizontal, oblong tombstone. Small, equilateral crosses are engraved on either side of the base of the cross. This grave is oriented from the east to the west, with the skeleton in the supine position, the head towards the west (length – 1.50 m), and the hands placed on the stomach. The skeleton was found on top of the gravestone 2.70 m below the surface. The grave did not contain any inventory [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:2-3].

Grave 9 – pit grave (fig. 8) oriented from the east to the west. A poorly preserved skeleton of a child was found under a large slab (2.0 x 0.75 meter) 2.50 m below the surface. The grave contained several objects, including a copper ring with a setting for a stone or gem, which had been displaced (fig. 23, Item 11, field №03:2-77:16), 24 spherical beads (fig. 23, Item 9, field №03:2-77:19), 3 oval-faceted, black agate beads (fig. 23, Item 10, field №03:2-77:21),¹² and two bracelets (fig. 23, Items 16-17). Of the two bracelets, one of them is black, rounded in cross-section, and made of non-transparent glass with a dull surface (field №03:2-77:4), while the second one is made of green, transparent glass, and is twisted and rounded in cross-section (fig. 23, Item 16, field №03:2-77:5) [Japaridze, Gochiashvili, 1978:3 Table XII].¹³

Grave 10 – pit grave (fig. 8), oriented from east to west, roofed with large size slabs (1.50x0.75 m). The skeleton was found on the gravestone 2.40 m below the surface in the supine position with the head oriented to the west and the hands placed on the stomach. The grave did not contain any inventory [Japaridze, Gochiashvili, 1978:3].

Grave 11 – pit grave (fig. 14), with an oblong (1.75x1.0 m) gravestone oriented from east to west. The skeleton was found on the gravestone at a depth of 2.40 m below the surface in the supine position with the head towards the west

11 The human remains, №7b, are not discussed in the report. If №7 and №7a individuals are buried one top of one another, it is likely that the №7b remains belong to another grave.

12 Similar agate beads from Dmanisi are dated the 12th-13th centuries [Dolaberidze, 1985:91, table XIV, fig. 14].

13 This type of twisted bracelet is dated to the 12th-13th cc. [Dolaberidze, 1969:110-111].

and the hands placed on the stomach. The grave did not contain any inventory [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:3].

A place given the number twelve had no grave.

Grave 13 – pit grave (fig. 8)¹⁴, oriented from east to west. The skeleton of a child was found 2.26 m below the surface in the supine position with the head oriented towards the west and the hands placed on the stomach. The bones of this individual were bordered with uneven stones. Many items were found adjacent to the grave, including 21 cylindrical glass beads (fig. 23, Item 15, field №03:2-77:7),¹⁵ one blue, oval glass bead reinforced with metal (fig. 23, Item 7, field №03:2-77:12), one cornelian bead (field №03:2-77:8), 30 oblong, quadrangle beads (fig. 23, Item 6, field №03:2-77), six white clay faience beads (fig. 23, Item 14), 1 blue-glazed faience bead (fig. 23, Item 8, field №03:2-77:10), and 1 half-spherical bone button with oblique-angled holes (fig. 23, Item 13, field №03:2-77:9). Also found near the grave (0.75 m) was a twisted cross necklace (fig. 23, Item 4, field №03:2-77:89) having arms of equal size with triangular extremities [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:3-4, Table XIV, picture 10]. Only one bead was found in the grave (fig. 23, Item 12, field №03:2-77:11). Buried with the deceased were a pair of glass bracelets on the right hand, one of which was transparent, black, and rounded in cross-section, while the other was occlusive, black-colored, and had a round transversal axis.¹⁶

Grave 14 – cist tomb lined with slabs (sizes - 2.70x0.67, depth 0.45 m), oriented from north-west to south-east (fig. 9). The skeleton was found 3.0 m below the surface in the supine position with the left arm bent and placed near the head and the right hand placed on the chest. The left leg was also bent. One cornelian and one spherical amber cap-form bead were found in the grave (fig. 23, Item 2, №03:2-77:114, and fig. 23, Item. 3, №03:2-77:115, respectively),¹⁷ along with a copper fibula having a pomegranate-shaped head (fig. 23, Item 1, field №03:2-77:116) [Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:4; Джапаридзе 1980:273].

14 The number of this grave, as well as graves 14-16, was different in various field documents and narrative reports. We corrected the numbers: 13 was 19, according to earlier numbering, while 14 was 19 II and 13 I; 15 was formerly 21, and 16 was formerly 20.

15 According to an enormous body of parallel material, the chronology of similar material known from Dmanisi and Rustavi has been established as being from the 13th century [Dolaberidze 1985:47-48].

16 In general, similar bracelets found in Georgia are dated to the 11th-13th cc. Dolaberidze 1969, 100-112. Similar material from Dzveli Gavazi is dated to the 12th-13th centuries: Chilashvili 1975, 56-59; see also Archvadze... 2005, 70, table XII, pictures 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9.

17 Similar type beads from the Koghotti and Samtavro cemeteries are dated to the 6th-7th centuries [Aphazava 1979:Table XIV, picture 2; table XVI, picture 14; table XLII, pictures 5,6.

Grave 15 – pit grave (fig. 8), oriented slightly from north-west to south-east. The skeleton was found 2.50 m below the surface in the supine position with the left hand placed upon the stomach and the right hand placed near the head. The grave did not contain any inventory.

Grave 16 – pit grave (fig. 8), oriented from east to west. The skeleton was found 2.5 m below the surface in the supine position with the head oriented towards the west, the right hand placed on the stomach, and the left hand placed near the chin. This grave did not contain any inventory.

Graves 15 and 16 were located very close to each other. The skeleton of tomb 15 appeared to have been damaged by grave 16. The skeleton from 15 is missing all bones below the femur and in their place are those same elements that belong to the individual from 16 (fig. 8).

As we can see, all the grave goods described above (except grave 14 from a lower level)¹⁸, are from the high medieval period, particularly the 11th-13th centuries AD, based on the age of similar material. If we also consider directly dateable materials, such as the two copper coins minted in the name of Tamar and David, one from within grave 1 and the other close to it, the majority of the graves date more specifically to the first half of the 13th c.

Graves 5 and 6 are of particular interest to our study, as one of them – grave 5 – has a gravestone with an inscription.

Grave 5 – pit grave (figs. 8 and 12), oriented from east to west. The skeleton was found 2.45 m below the surface in the supine position with its head towards the west, the right hand placed on the chest, and the left placed on the stomach. The grave did not contain any inventory.¹⁹

No skeleton was found in grave 6.²⁰ 5 and 6 were both pit graves; each had three memorial segments above ground. First, they were roofed with common pedestal-shaped rectangular slabs (1.15x1.6x0.2 m). Secondly, horizontal gravestones with double-sided, roof-style surfaces were placed on this stone tile (figs. 5-6). The gravestones from 5 and 6 each had crosses depicted on the sides and they measured 1.12x0.3x0.25 m and 1.10x0.25x0.20 m, respectively (fig. 16). Thirdly, stele-shaped memorial gravestones with four facets had

18 The gravestone and grave goods from 14 date to the Early Middle Ages, likely the 7th c, based on similar material [Apkhazava, 1979:table XII, pictures 4, 13; XIV, picture 2; XLII, pictures 5, 6].

19 The depth and description of grave 5 is based on the original field plans and documents (plan №03:5-77:162).

20 Descriptions of graves 5 and 6 are not given in the text of the field archaeological report. We only know that the graves did not have any goods and 6 did not contain a skeleton (Japaridze, Gochiashvili 1978:2).

been erected on the west side of both horizontal gravestones: The height of 5 reached 0.43 m while 6 was 0.38 m.

The area containing graves 4-16²¹ was partially enclosed on the western and northern sides by stone walls with a thickness of 0.70-0.80m and a surviving height of approximately 0.80-0.90 m.²² The walls mentioned above create a 90-degree angle at the intersection in the north-west portion (figs. 8-9, 17). The internal length of the preserved northern wall is 4.40 m and the length of the western wall is 5.20 m. The western part of the wall separates two areas containing graves 1-3 and 4-16. The walls likely continued to the south and east, but unfortunately, this portion of trench V was damaged in the past century during the construction of the Tbilisi-Yerevan road. Therefore, it is probable that the southern and eastern walls and also parts of the graves inside the walls uncovered in trench V had been damaged during this road construction.

Graves from trench XIII were surrounded by what appears to be the remains of a wall (0.50-0.70 m wide) built with cut stones and slaked limestone, formerly a common practice at the Dmanisi cemetery.²³ Their function was to isolate one group of family or dynastic graves and their above-ground memorial monuments from the other groups of graves. It is worth noting that mausoleums were also walled in at the Dmanisi cemetery. With this in mind, two mausoleums unearthed in 1970-1971 are of special interest: №3, a quadrangular structure (3.30x3.10 m), and №4, a spherical structure (diameter-6.0 m). Both buildings consist of walls built with cut stones and quadrilateral floor plan (12.0x9.30 m) [Japaridze 1984:20]. One of them (№4,) appeared to be a collective, family mausoleum with round graves located inside and 13 gravestones with Arabic inscriptions [Japaridze 1984:20-26].

Considering the common practice of enclosing graves belonging to certain families, this group of graves is likely a family cemetery. The west wall divided graves 1-3 and 4-16, but observations on the wall allow for hypothesizing that graves 1-3 had been the first to be enclosed, with what is described as the western wall initially serving as the eastern wall for graves 1-3. Graves 4-16 were added later along with the northern wall, which becomes more apparent if we also include observations regarding the building levels. Additionally, remains of a round wall surrounding the graves are present in trench VI to the north of trench V. It is possible that these family graves with well-built walls

21 Not including grave 14, since it was discovered in the lower level and dates to the Early Middle Ages, unlike the graves discovered on upper level.

22 The original report and other archaeological documents did not mention a wall. Therefore, we do not know if slake lime had been used during the construction of the wall.

23 The remains of such buildings can be accurately differentiated quite often.

of average thickness (0.70-0.80 m) also had flat roofing, but without additional evidence, this theory cannot be confirmed.²⁴

Gravestones from graves 5 and 6

Burial 5, stele-shaped gravestone (№ dm.15). The gravestone is made of greenish-grayish tuff (fig. 18), is almost equilateral in form and its overall height is 0.80 m, of which 0.43 m was above-ground. The upper portion is well cut, having sides with right angles, while the lower 0.37 m is roughly cut and has a spike ending for insertion into the ground. The eastern facet of the gravestone (0.43x0.27 m) has an arched recess 0.18 m wide and 0.33 m high, with four lines of a carved *Asomtavruli* inscription inside:

1. † [-] ႁ႑
2. ႕႗ ႕႗
3. ႗.႑†႗
4. ႕႗.



The maximum and minimum heights of the letters are 6.5 cm and 4.3 cm, respectively. After a reconstruction of the contracted text, the inscription reads as follows:²⁵ “**Christ, the Lord, be merciful to the soul of Okro**”.

The epitaph begins with a monogram of Christ, and the space between the sign and the following word is damaged. Therefore, it is hard to determine if there are any other letters between them.²⁶ There is a contraction mark after the letters **R** and **o**, which translates as “**the Lord.**” Another contraction

24 It is possible, though to a lesser degree, that graves had been roofed with tiles. Tiles, however, are not present in the specific trenches of the Dmanisi cemetery thus supporting this idea. Also, the vast majority of dwellings and buildings for production and religious purposes unearthed in the city had flat roofing.

25 We want to thank Prof. Temo Jojua for assisting us in deciphering the inscription.

26 The space is small, so only one letter may be there. If we assume that the first line of the epitaph had the **q** at the beginning, the damaged place may contain the letter **e**. A fragment of a contraction mark seems to be on the top of whatever letter was there. If we suppose that an engraved spike between the first and the second word is a separation mark, we can conclude that the first word is “**Christ**”, followed by “**the Lord**”, being separated by one dot. We reconstruct the subsequent word as “**be merciful**”, however it may be reconstructed as a male name such as **Iese** or **Iovane**. If that is the case, the epitaph would read as follows: Christ, the Lord, Iovane, son of Okro. We could then conclude that Iovane was the deceased, not Okro. However, we doubt that the epitaph would only have names without the words “**be merciful**”.

mark is over the letters **S** and **e**, which reads, “be merciful.” A contraction mark should also be over the letters **s** and **l**, which would have been read as “**soul**.” One dot is used as a separation mark between the last letter and the following word defining the name, “Okroisi.” The inscription ends with a dot.

Both of the high arched recesses (0.13x.35m) cut on the southern and northern facades (0.43x0.27 m) of the gravestone have crosses with wattled ornaments cut inside of them.

The western side of the gravestone (0.42x0.25 m) has a recess 0.18 m wide, 0.30 m high and 0.01 m deep. Unlike the recess with the inscription on the eastern facade, the recess on the western facade has another recess inside that is 0.14 m wide, 0.26 m high, and 0.02 m deep.

The last word of the inscription, Okro, is the name of the deceased. This was a common male name during the medieval period in Georgia [Monuments of Georgian Law 1965:29] and had a few different variations: Okria, Okrua, and Okropiri. The surname “Okromchedlishvili” likely originated from this name –and is even mentioned in one of the documents pertaining to Dmanisi that dates to 1537-1538 [Monuments of Georgian Law 1972:16]. In addition, the stone cross dates to the 12th -13th centuries AD. It was found in historical Tori, close to the village of Gujarati, in the ancient settlement of Toneti, and has an inscription with the male name Okro (Okropiri). According to the author of the research, the man belonged to a high social class [Berdzenishvili 1986:45-46].

The Okro/Okrua mentioned in this gravestone inscription likely belonged to a prominent family. His grave consists of three segments – 1) a pedestal, 2) a rock in the form of a sarcophagus with a double-faceted roof surface and 3) a stele-shaped memorial gravestone with an inscription indicating that he belonged to a high social class. Since an analogous grave is tough to find anywhere in Georgia, let alone Dmanisi, this conclusion seems to be fair.

When considering the date of the inscription on the memorial monument and the goods from other graves on the same level in trench V, especially the coin of Tamar and David minted in 1200 AD, the chronology of the paleographic data and the grave goods seem to agree and these remains were likely interred in the 13th century AD.

Carved inscriptions, namely epitaphs, on high medieval Georgian paleographic monuments are rare and are typically present at the Dmanisi cemetery on Arabic tombstones [Kakhiani, 1965]. Furthermore, the majority of gravestones with Arabic inscriptions dating to the 13th-14th centuries are written with carved letters. Perhaps the tombstone from grave 5 is an example of local

traditions influencing burial behaviors across cultures, thus explaining the rarity of the find.

As we have mentioned before, pit burials 5 and 6 were roofed together with a pedestal-shaped, well-cut slab (1.15x1.60x0.20 m). In medieval Georgia, and also in later periods, large-size gravestones were used for memorials dedicated to spouses. On these joint gravestones for a wife and husband having high reliefs, the man is usually depicted on the right side of the gravestone and buried on the same side (Nadiradze 2000:121, illustration 43). This position of the deceased may be influenced by the Christian wedding ceremony tradition, where usually the man stands on the right and the woman on the left. Thus, if this last point is true, the wife of Okro/Okrua from Dmanisi was buried on the left. Unfortunately, no skeleton was recovered in grave 6.²⁷

Burial 6 with a stele-shaped gravestone (№ dm.14). The gravestone is made of bluish-grayish tuff (fig. 19). It is nearly shaped like an equilateral stele, with an overall height of 0.67 m, of which 0.40 m was above-ground. The facets are well cut and the sides have right angles. The lower part of the stele (0.27 m) is roughly cut and has a spike-shaped bottom for strong insertion into the ground. The eastern facade of the gravestone (0.38x0.16 m) has an arched recess that is 0.16 m wide and 0.26 m high and contains a carved cross resting on a two-stepped pedestal. High arched recesses are cut (0.10x0.26m) on the southern and northern facades (0.38x0.16 m) and each contains carved flower-like ornaments.

The western facade (0.40x0.17 m) of the gravestone has an arched recess that measures 0.17 m wide by 0.26 m high. Like the burial gravestone from grave 5 (dm.15), the western face has a 0.015 m recess that contains another recess measuring 0.23 m high, 0.12 m wide, and 0.01 m.

27 We can reasonably suppose that graves 5 and 6, as a common memorial monument for a husband and wife, initially had only the remains of Okro/Okrua. The memorial of the wife seems to be symbolic since she was not buried there. Upon the death of either a wife or a husband, common memorials are erected in advance even today and this is attested by anthropologists. Therefore, we can suppose that a common memorial was arranged by the wife of Okro/Okrua after his death, which included her own memorial, though she was not buried there for unknown reasons. If Okro/Okrua died before the 1230s AD, which is supported by the paleographic interpretation of the epitaph and the coin of Tamar and David, it is possible that his wife died during the Mongol raid on Dmanisi. If so, perhaps her remains were unrecognizable or there simply was no one left in the city to bury her properly. The Armenian historian Kirakos of Gandzak mentioned that in 1235, when the Mongols took the city of Lore, they had massacred all the refugees in and around the city [Киракос Гандзакеці 1976:163]. Alternatively, she may have been captured and taken far from Dmanisi. In either case, a tragedy at Dmanisi similar to what happened at Lore may have caused the death or disappearance of the wife. It is also possible that after the death of Okro/Okrua, his wife married another man and was buried with her second husband instead.

Based on their proximity, overall similarities, and the burial traditions of the high Middle Ages, the burial gravestones from graves 6 (dm.14) and 5 (dm. 15) should be discussed as two segments of one memorial monument, which is an above-ground memorial dedicated to a married couple.

Dmanisi cemetery gravestones from trench XIII

In 1986, several archaeological trenches were opened in the south-eastern part of the Dmanisi cemetery.²⁸ One of them, trench XII (5x9 m), contained three cist tombs with roughly-cut rectangular slabs and 20 pit graves arranged according to Christian rites. Of the 23 graves, six contained grave goods that date to the 12th-13th centuries AD, including glass bracelets, copper and glass paste beads, and bronze finger rings.

In the same year, trench XIII (4x4 m) was opened near trench XII and two distinct levels of burials were unearthed. 26 pit graves in total were excavated within trench XIII, most at a depth of 1.0-1.60 m below the surface, seven of which belonged to children. As indicated by the fieldwork records, the second level of graves (graves №17-20, 26) dating to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age based on the associated grave goods and were found several meters lower and cut into virgin soil. Of the excavated graves, only 12 had gravestones, each roofed with flat rectangular slabs, while three appeared to be sarcophagus-shaped stones with a double-sided roof surface. [Джапаридзе, Копалиани, Бугианишвили, Болквадзе, Гочиашвили, М.Ш. Мгеладзе, Н.Р. Абрамишвили, Р.С. 1991:108]. Additionally, 12 graves contained grave goods that date to the high medieval period, including bracelets made of green, blue, dark blue or black glass rounded in cross section with a simple or twisted surface. Some copper spherical buttons and a copper coin of Queen Rusudan were found near graves 7 and 8 [Japaridze... 1986:29-34].

On the flat stone surface of grave 6, a stylized anthropomorphic figure was depicted with a cross on his chest.²⁹ Placed atop grave 9 was a cube-shaped stele fragment with the depiction of a Bolnisi-type cross along with ornaments characteristic of the early medieval period. This cross possibly was of second-hand use and the deceased appeared to have been buried according to Christian rites.

28 M. Gochiashvili was the head of the archaeological group.

29 It is possible that grave also belongs to the late medieval period if we consider the chronology of their creation, since there are other graves on the first level that seem to date to that period.

The excavation also recovered two stele-shaped gravestones from outside the southwest corner of trench XIII (fig. 20) in the same year. The gravestones each had crosses on their eastern faces, while one had an ornament and the other had an *Asomtavruli* epitaph on their western faces [Джапаридзе... 1991:108].³⁰ These gravestones were erected vertically on the graves, and the distance between them was 0.45 m. One of the gravestones (№ dm.32) was erected on top of grave 27, which is a pit burial oriented from the east to the west.³¹ The deceased was in the supine position with the head to the west and the hands placed on the chest (fig. 20).

Burial 27 with a stele-shaped gravestone (№ dm. 32). The gravestone is cut from greenish-grayish tuff and dates to the second half of the 13th century AD, based on the materials found within other graves on the same level. The overall height is 0.67 m (fig. 21) and the lower portion (0.35 m) is roughly-cut with a wedge-shaped bottom for insertion into the ground. The eastern face of the gravestone (0.32x0.19 m) has a carved cross on a pedestal, the western face (0.32x0.19 m) has some wattle-like ornamentations, and the southern and northern faces (0.32x0.07x0.08 m) are simple. The ornamentation on the western face is typical of Georgian gravestones from this period. There are several cases of this ornamentation on Islamic stele-shaped gravestones, and even one example from Dmanisi: a triangular-headed, stele-shaped gravestone (№11:0.45x0.23x0.13 m) with an Arabic inscription on the eastern face that mentions Kasim Ahmad Ibn Khawaja, while each of the other faces have the ornamentation. These ornamentations characteristic of Georgian decoration motifs represent the influence of Georgian traditions on the cultural diversity at Dmanisi. This gravestone, however, has no date, but based on comparative materials the author report placed it in the first half of the 13th century AD [Kakhiani 1960:105-106, table XXIII-XXVII].

The urban period of Dmanisi had a very distinctive cultural diversity with people of many different origins and traditions, which is reflected in the local material culture as well as the urban cemetery. Based on the similarity between the techniques for cutting the gravestones, the material used, and the overall design of the memorials, it is possible that the same craftsmen had created memorial monuments for both Dmanisi Christians (Georgian and Armenian) and Muslims, though they would have taken into account the specific

30 Published reports from that year do not contain information about the two gravestones, but we are able to reconstruct grave contexts from the field documents, which include photographs and plans.

31 The description is given according to the plan from the original field documents. According to those documents, grave 27 contained no goods.

demands of each religion. Typically, the “authors” of the Georgian, Armenian, and Arabic epitaphs would have received specific “education” for this purpose.

Burials 28-29,³² with a stele-shaped gravestone (№ dm. 26). The gravestone is made from greenish-grayish tuff (fig. 22) with an overall height of 0.65 m. The above-ground portion (0.38 m) is well cut while the lower portion (0.35 m) is roughly cut, having a wedge-shaped bottom for insertion into the ground. The eastern face (0.38x0.24 m) has an engraving of a cross resting on a pedestal, the southern and northern faces (0.38x0.12x0.13 m) are simple, and the western face has an engraved epitaph in *Asomtavruli* letters split between three lines. The maximum and minimum heights of the letters are 6.1 cm and 3.1 cm, respectively. Our reconstruction of the Georgian inscription is as follows:

1. †: ႱႱႱႱ
2. ႱႱႱႱ
3. ႱႱ: ႱႱ:-



After the reconstruction of the contracted text, the inscription should be read as follows: “**Christ, the Lord, be merciful to the soul of Ebia**”.

As with the previous inscription, this inscription begins with the monogram of Christ. A contraction mark was used under the letters Ⴑ and Ⴑ (to the soul), Ⴑ and Ⴑ (be merciful). The last contraction mark, however, is not on the top of the letters, but is after two dots that serve as a separation mark in the middle of the letter.

According to the inscription, the root of the deceased’s name is “Ebi”. First names with similar roots in Georgian onomastics are Ebia, Ebina, Ebi-naat, Ebita and the surname Ebitasshvili/Ebitashvili likely originated from the name. All of these names are mentioned in Georgian historical documents of the 17th century, which connect names to contracts, separations, and donations [Annotated Dictionary of persons, 1993:106-107]. According to these documents, this male name seems to be frequent in the inner and lower Kartli regions of Georgia. Conversely, if this name represents a female in this context, perhaps the closely associated graves 27 and 28-29 (dm. 32 and dm. 26) belong to the memorials of a wife and husband, with the wife on the left side and the husband on the right, as observed in previous cases (Okro/Okrua and his

³² Since the remains of two humans were found here, the grave was given the numbers 28 and 29.

wife's memorial monument). Though this is an interesting thought, a female name having a similar root is unknown.

As shown in the plans for graves 28-29, remains from two humans were found at the gravestone for Ebi/Ebia/Ebita. It's difficult to determine however, if they were buried in a collective grave and one deceased was buried on top of the other, or if they were initially buried in multiple graves. It is important to note that a thin copper ring with an oval setting was found near the remains of the grave 28 (fig. 23, Item 34). Similar rings from Sioni date to the 11th-13th centuries AD. [Ramishvili 1970:108-110, 109, picture 15, №75].

According to the material presented and archaeological reports, graves 28 and 29 date to the 13th century AD. The epitaphs and inscriptions on the gravestone (№ dm. 26) conform to this chronology based on the paleographic data. Additionally, the second tombstone without inscriptions likely dates to the 13th century AD, as its overall form is consistent with a previously found tombstone from David the Builder's gate in Gelati.³³

Conclusion

According to the written sources and archaeological, historical, and architectural remains, Dmanisi was a multiethnic town where different religions and cultures co-existed and influenced each other at the same time. This is reflected in the material culture; especially in the material found in the Dmanisi cemetery.

The urban period cemetery at Dmanisi is represented by both Muslim and Christian burials – the latter being of Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Gregorian sects. Gravestones with either Arabic or Armenian inscriptions help date the cemetery to the 13th-14th centuries AD.

The discovery of two gravestones with Georgian inscriptions refutes the previously held assumption that it was not a Georgian tradition to place epitaphs on gravestones during the high medieval period. One such gravestone (№ dm. 15) at grave 5 in trench V belongs to a male individual based on the Georgian *Asomtavruli* inscription. The reconstructed epitaph reads as follows: **“Christ, the Lord, be merciful to the soul of Okro”**. According to the decorations above ground, the name on the inscription, and recorded Georgian burial traditions, it is probable that this grave belongs to a husband, though the wife was never buried on her side of the tomb. The associated grave goods, including numismatic materials from graves 5 and 6, supports the dating of

³³ The epitaph on the gravestone indicated that it belonged to Adai, the son of Nerchi [Gagoshidze 2011:25-26]. The author dated it to the second half of the 13th century AD.

these finds to the first half of the 13th century AD, which the paleographic data does not contradict.

The other gravestone (№ dm. 26) with Georgian inscriptions was associated with graves 28 and 29 close to trench XIII in the south-eastern part of the Dmanisi cemetery. The reconstruction of the contracted text reads as follows: “**Christ, the Lord, be merciful to the soul of Ebia**”. Based on the grave goods associated with this group of graves, this gravestone can be dated to the 13th century AD. The content of the epitaph and paleographic signs of the inscriptions do not seem to contradict the chronology.

As I have shown, a tradition of decorating gravestones with Arabic, Armenian, and Georgian designs and epitaphs existed at the Dmanisi cemetery during the high medieval period. The research discussed in this article about high medieval gravestones with Georgian inscriptions discovered at Dmanisi, the original field documents, and studies associated with the following findings is intriguing for the following reasons. As mentioned in this article, it was previously thought that it was not traditional in high medieval Georgia to have tombstones with inscriptions on the burials due to the lack of high medieval gravestones and epitaphs. This article demonstrates that burial inscriptions are present at Dmanisi during the Middle Ages. I hope that in the future there will be much more attention focused on inscription studies regarding medieval city cemeteries and medieval gravestones.

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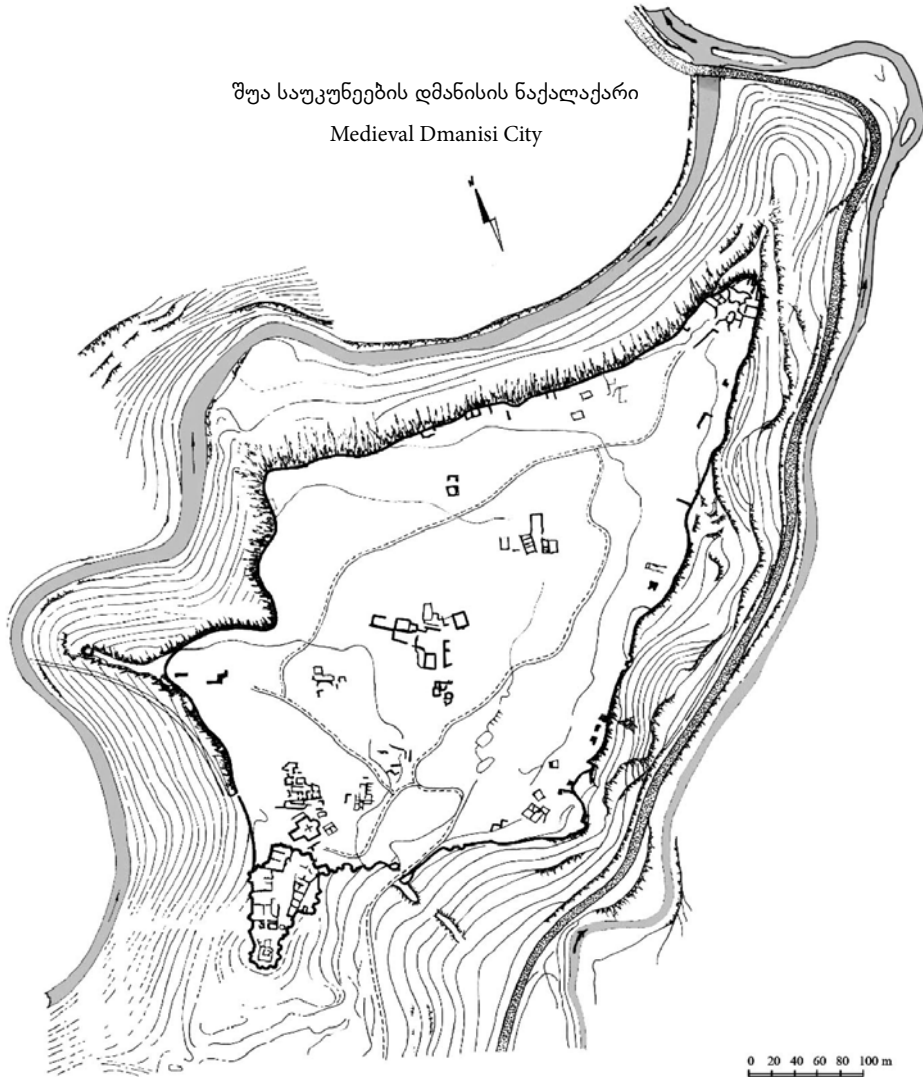
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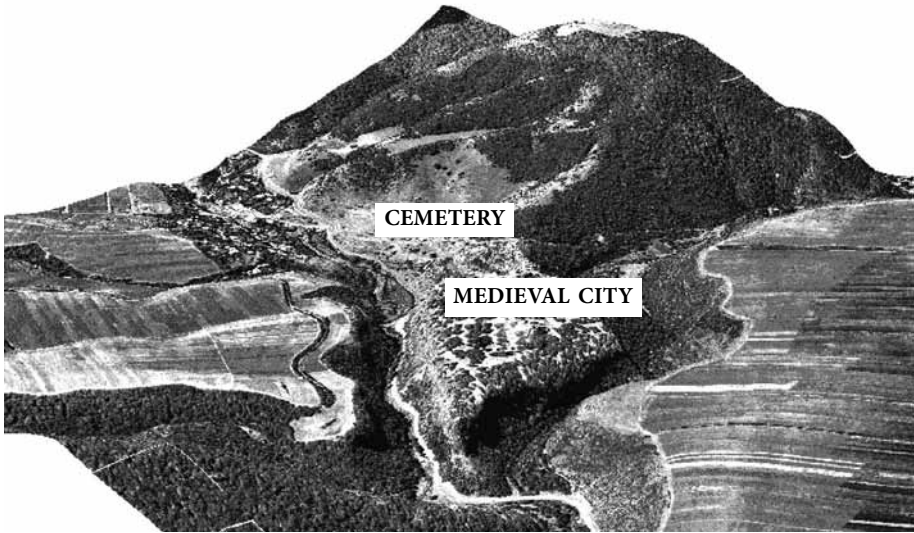
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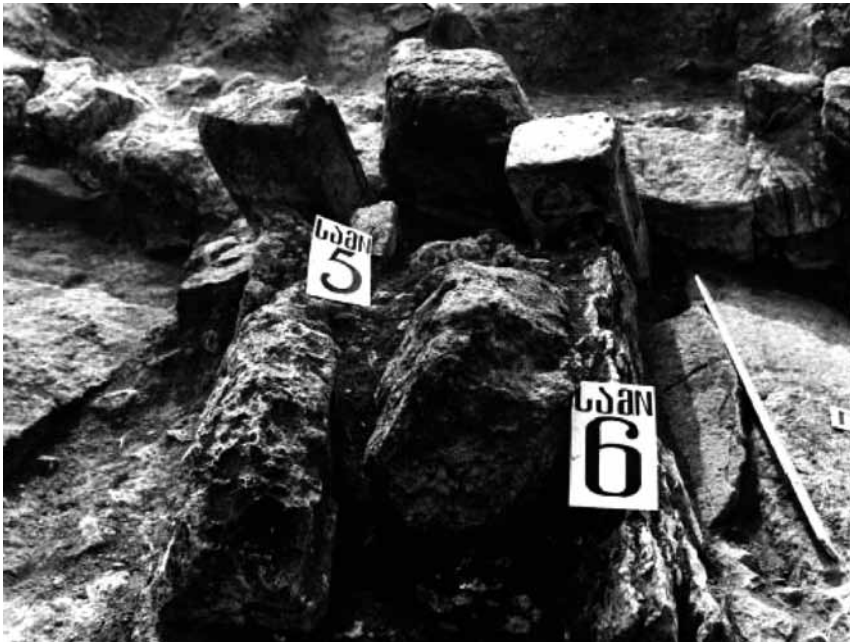
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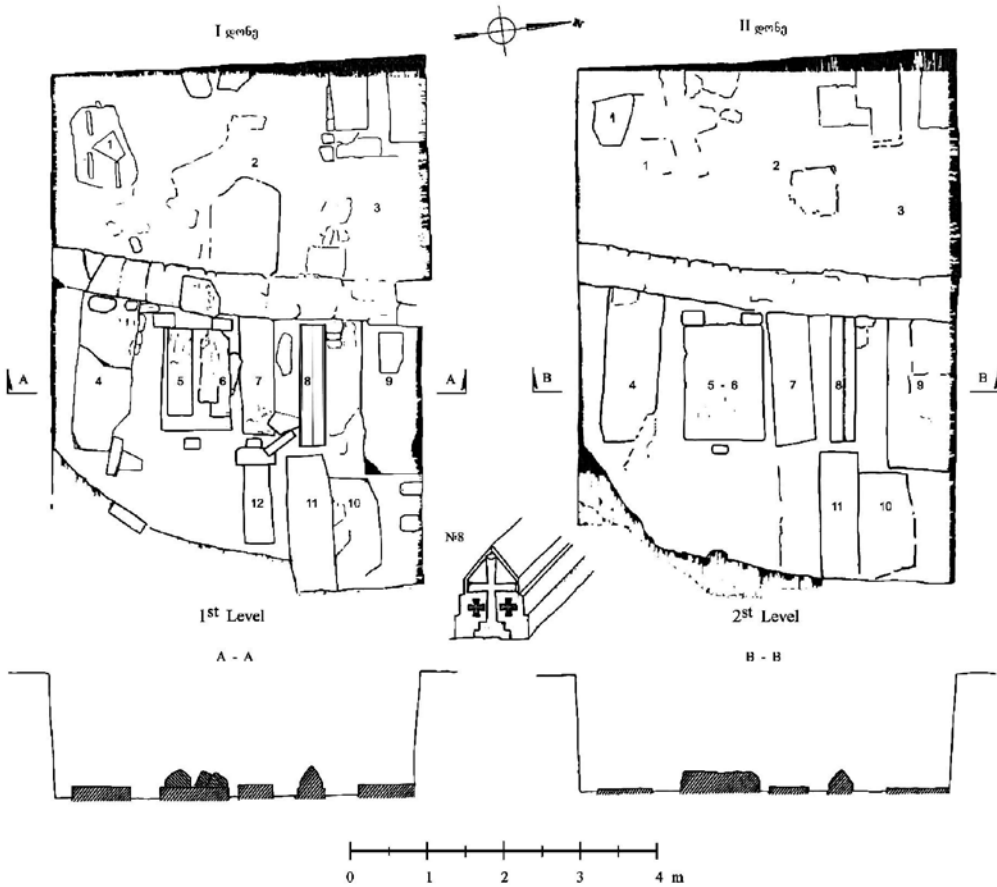


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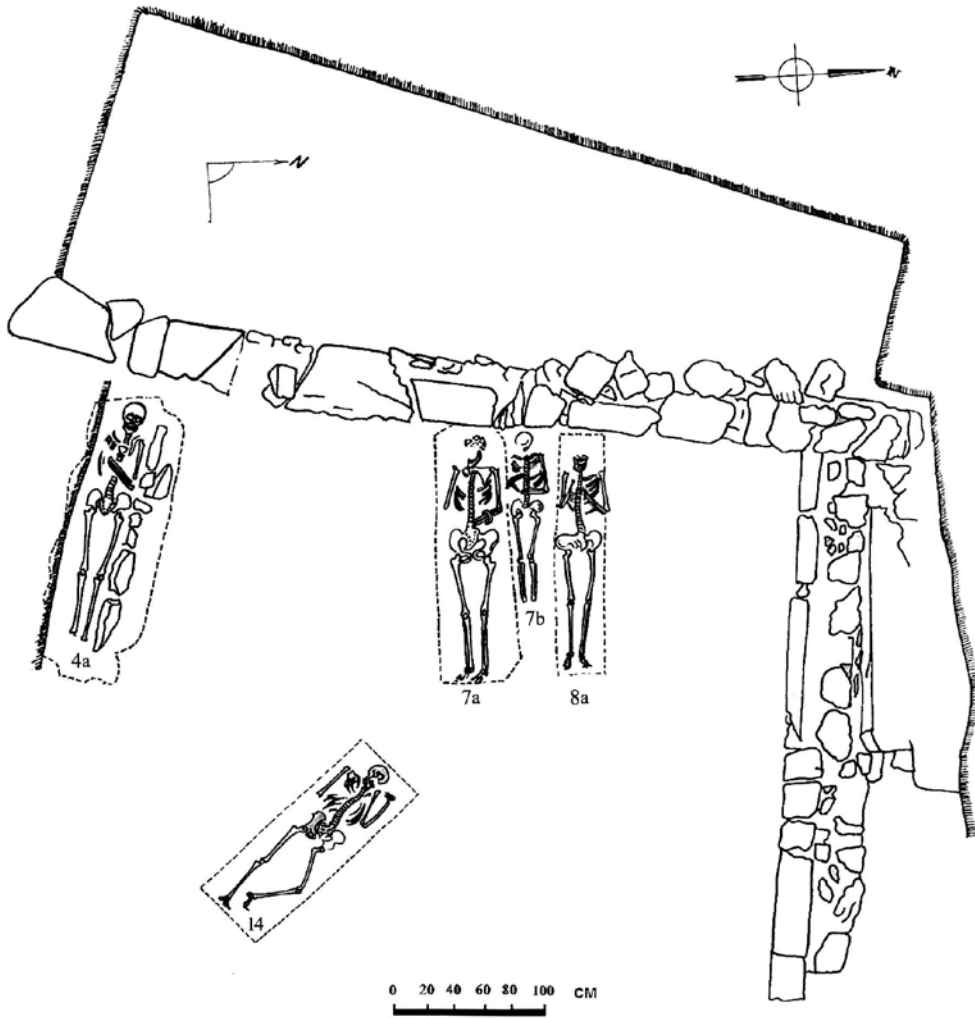


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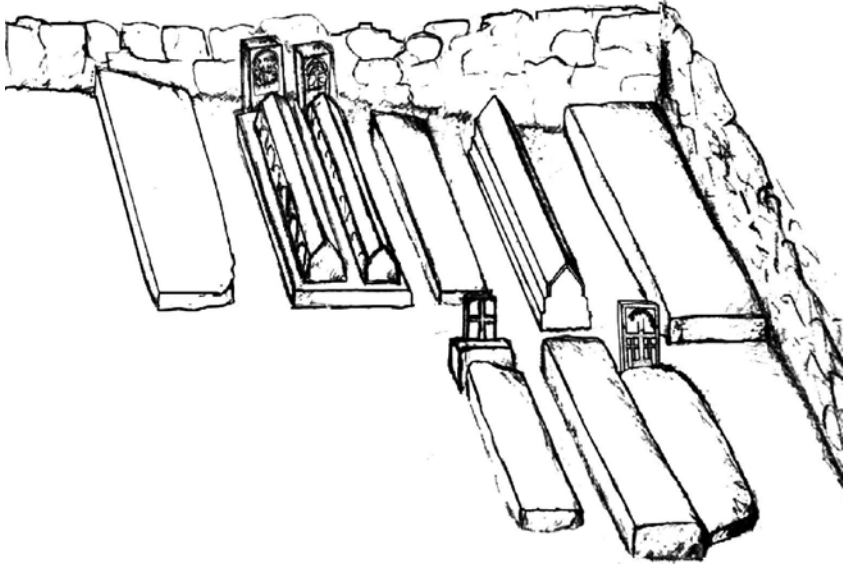
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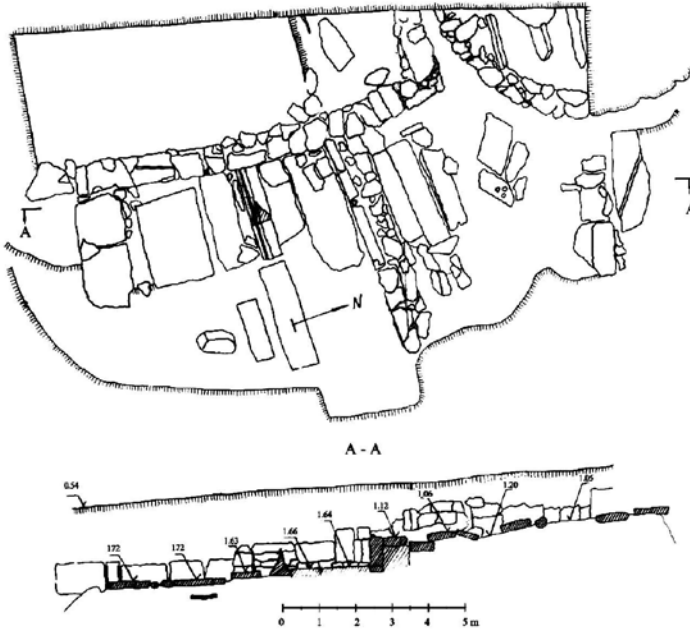


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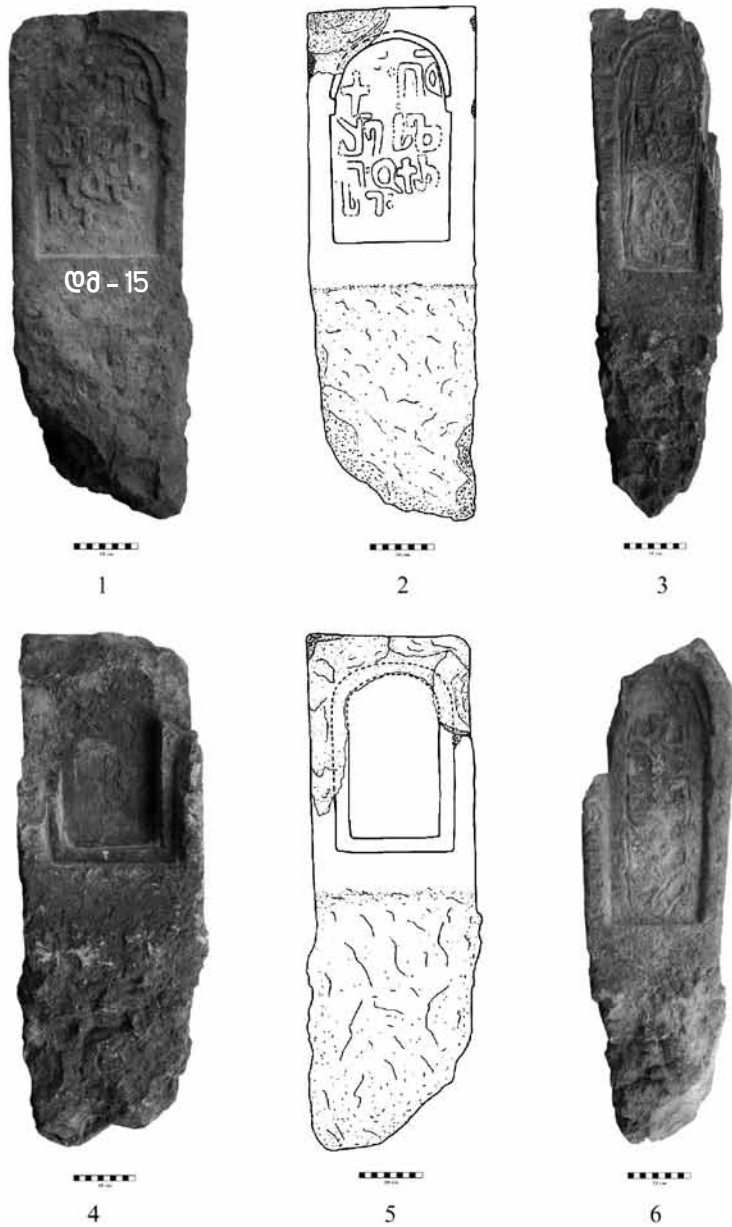
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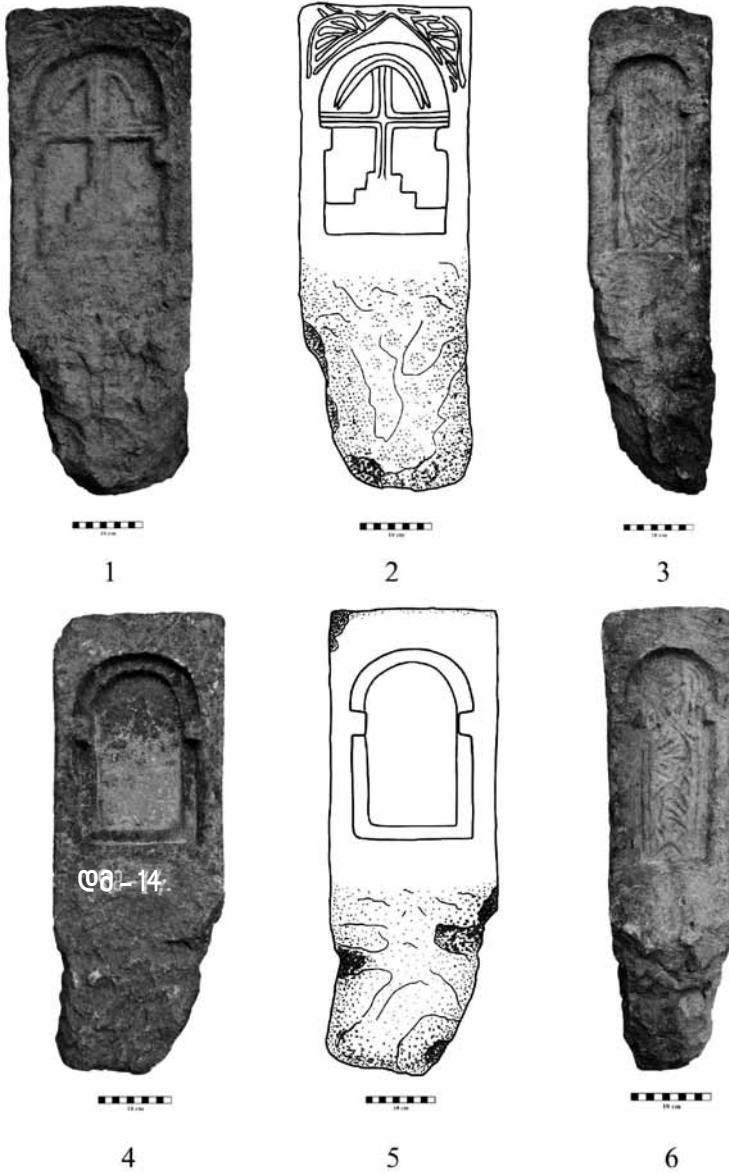
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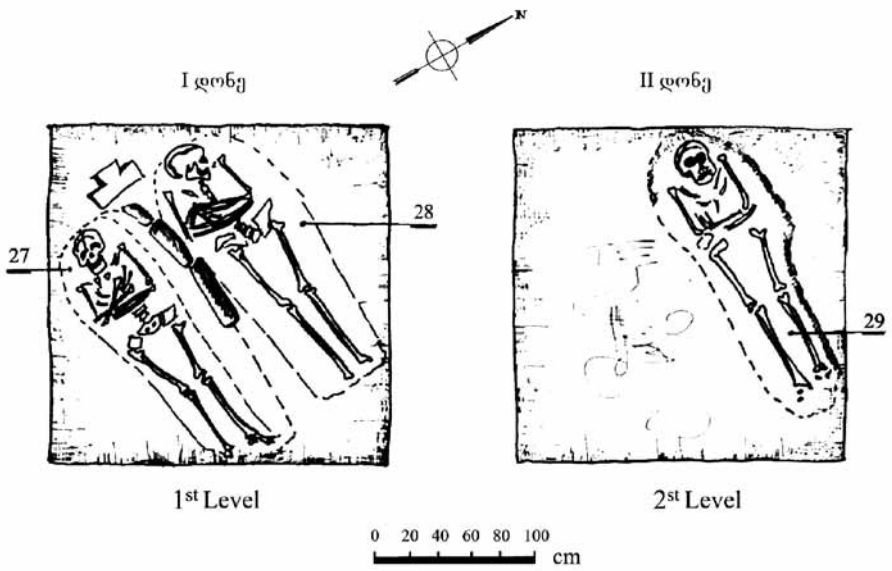
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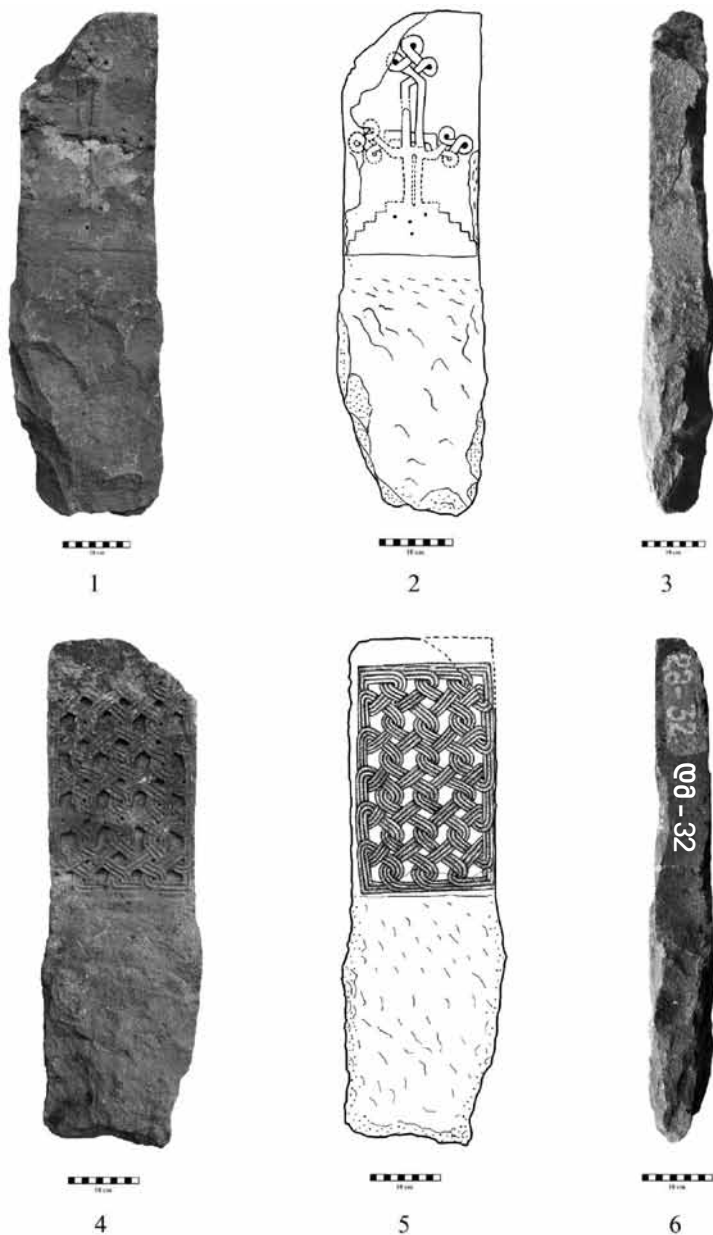
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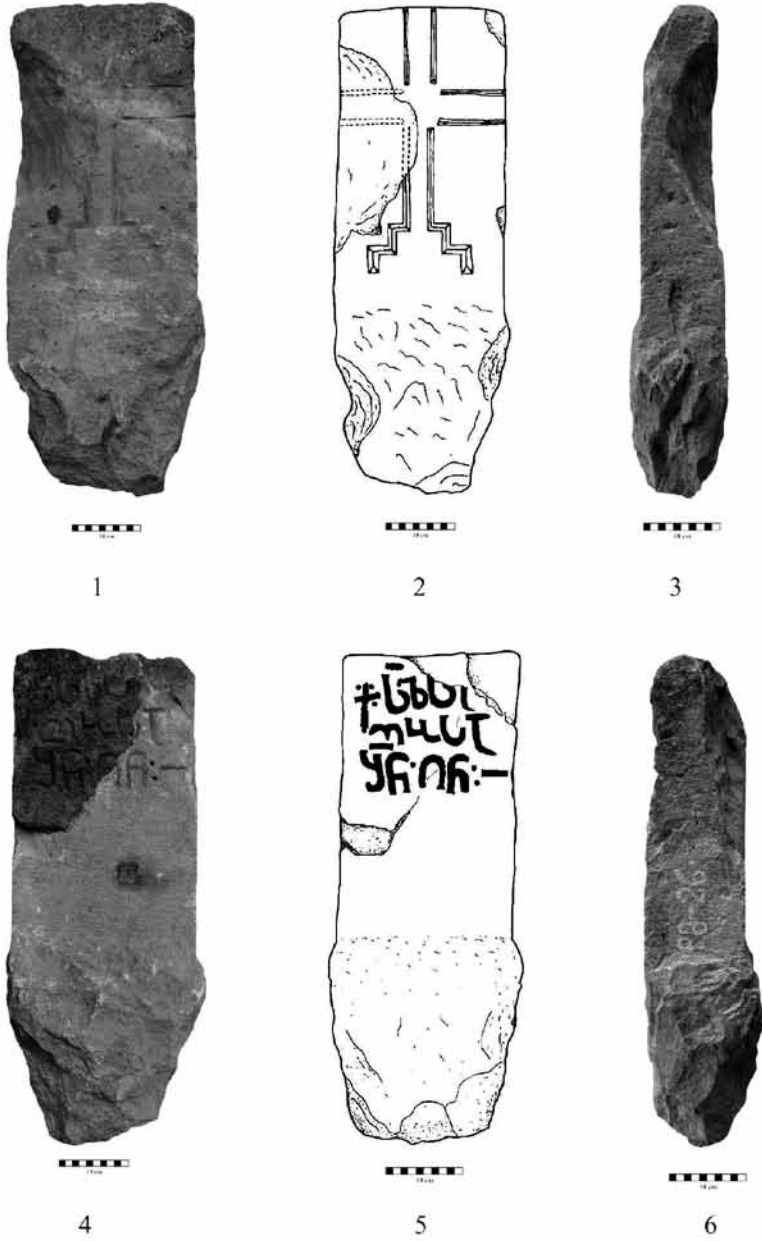
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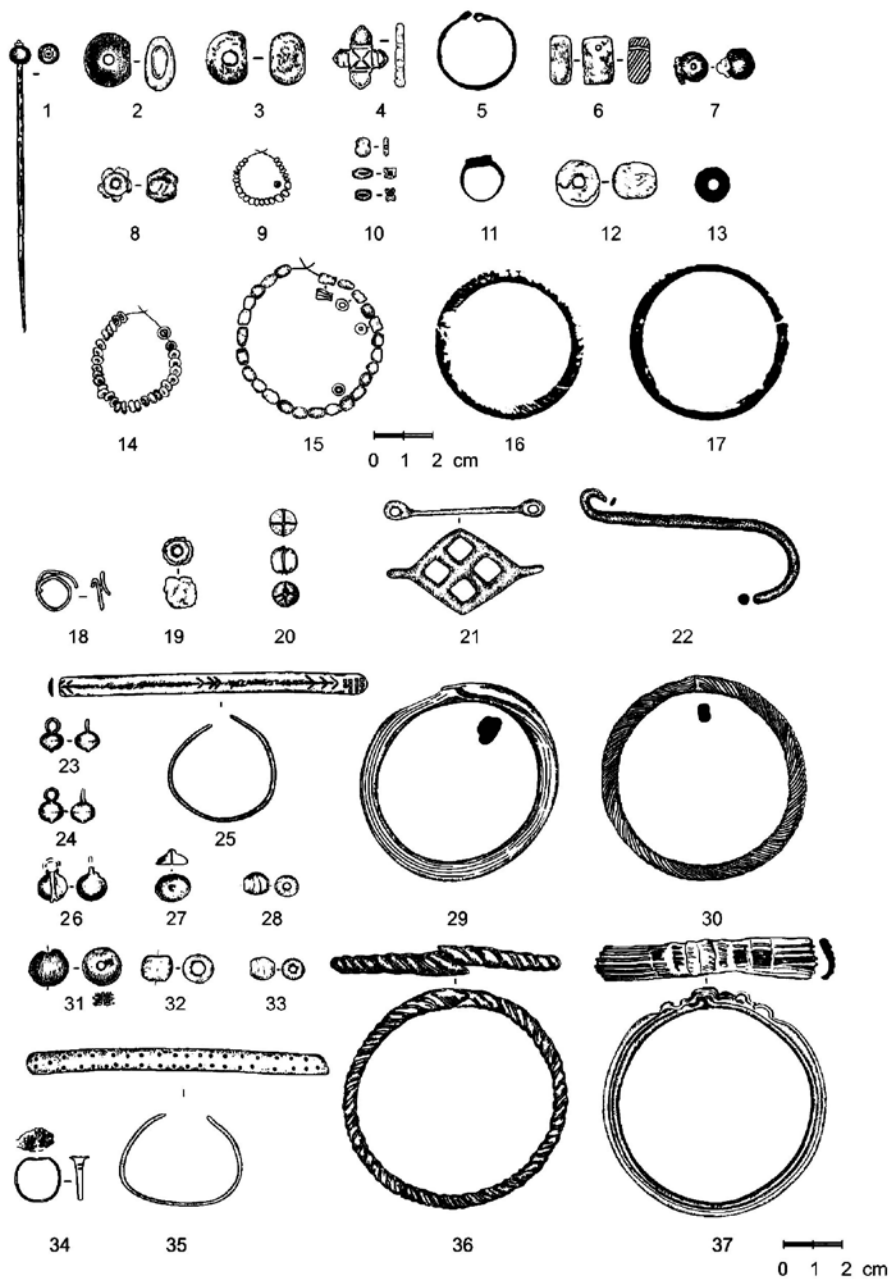
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