

# A NEWLY DISCOVERED NECROPOLIS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE WEST BLACK SEA COAST – ISSUES OF CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *necropolă, cultura Kodjadermen – Gumelnitsa – Karanovo VI, Varna, eneolitic, ceramică.*

**Abstract:** *The newly found necropolis gives new important information about the territorial range and the cultural characteristics of both Kodjadermen – Gumelnița – Karanovo VI and Varna. Two of the discovered graves are also interesting for solving the problems regarding the end of the Eneolithic culture and the transition to the Bronze Age. Even though it is too early for generalizations at this stage, it is possible to state that the finds do not support the existing hypothesis about the Varna culture extending territorially to the south of Stara Planina.*

**Rezumat:** *Necropola nou descoperită ne oferă informații importante asupra razei teritoriale și caracteristicilor culturale ale culturilor Kodjadermen – Gumelnița – Karanovo VI și Varna. Două dintre mormintele descoperite sunt de asemenea interesante pentru rezolvarea problemelor privind sfârșitul culturii eneoliticului și tranziția la Epoca Bronzului. Deși este prea devreme pentru a generaliza în acest stadiu al cercetărilor, este posibil să afirmăm că descoperirile nu susțin actuala ipoteză a extinderii teritoriale a culturii Varna la sud de Stara Planina.*

The tell Kozareva Mogila and its necropolis are located near Kableschkovo, Municipality Pomorie, District Bourgas, about 4 km west of the present-day coast of the Black Sea. From a physical-geographical point of view, this is the Thrace region, but is also the Black Sea region and this is reflected in the specifics of the culture of the population during the different periods. There isn't a lot of data on the Eneolithic period from this region. Apart from Kozareva Mogila, an underwater settlement close to Sozopol<sup>1</sup> and a tell close to Bourgas are also

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<sup>1</sup> DRAGANOV 1998.

studied. The finds from the early Eneolithic period show similarities with the Maritsa culture from Thrace and, from the Black Sea region, with the Hamandjia and the Sava cultures, being closest to Sava<sup>2</sup>. The culture from the late Eneolithic period, as far as it is known from Kozareva Mogila and Sozopol doesn't show significant differences with the culture from the whole region of Kodjadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI and Varna. The studied horizons from the late Eneolithic period from Kozareva Mogila and Sozopol are from its final stage<sup>3</sup>. They don't have synchronous settlements in the Black Sea region north of the Balkan Mountains, but with different levels of relativity, they are said to be from the last and second to last phase of the Varna culture<sup>4</sup>.

The Varna culture is one of the most impressive phenomena of the Eneolithic period in Southeastern Europe. More necropolises than settlements are known from it. It is precisely the necropolises that distinguish it from the Kodjadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI culture, with the specific burial rites — the men being laid on their back, the women in a hocker position and the very rich grave inventories<sup>5</sup>. These characteristics are explained with the genesis and the geographic location of the culture.

Despite the many studied settlement tells in Thrace, there were no necropolises found, until the discovery of the one at Kozareva Mogila. The reasons for this are most probably subjective. In this sense, the newly found necropolis gives new important information about the territorial range and the cultural characteristics of both Kodjadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI and Varna. Two of the discovered graves are also interesting for solving the problems regarding the end of the eneolithic culture and the transition to the Bronze Age.

**The necropolis.** Kozareva Mogila has layers from the early and late Eneolithic period, the early Bronze Age and the Hellenistic age, but there are remains (ceramics) in the fields around the site from all ages. In 2005 a necropolis was accidentally discovered on account of agricultural works in the area northwest of the tell. The whole area is traditionally used for agriculture. It had been covered with vineyards, which were uprooted around 30 years ago, and after that with annual crops. The depth of the tillage was around 70-90 cm — preparation for the planting of an orchard. Human bones, two completely whole vessels (one Hellenistic kantharos, covered with black phirnis and one early-medieval bowl with a pentagram on the bottom), ceramic fragments and some flint tools had surfaced on to the ground. The ceramics were Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Hellenistic, Roman Age and medieval. There were almost whole and visibly freshly broken hellenistic and medieval vessels. Subject of the agricultural work was a huge area and there were many finds all over it. More interesting finds from the early Eneolithic period were a flint point of a spear, an anthropomorphic figurine and part of a zoomorphic figurine (Fig. 1).

The goal of the first emergency excavations was to establish the extent to which Eneolithic graves are present and the area in which they would be located.

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<sup>2</sup> GEORGIEVA 1998.

<sup>3</sup> GEORGIEVA 2004.

<sup>4</sup> TODOROVA 1986, p. 119-123; DRAGANOV 1998; GEORGIEVA 2004.

<sup>5</sup> TODOROVA 1986, p. 193-196; TODOROVA 2002.

The Eneolithic ceramics were in relatively high quantity, scattered over a large area and were fired, with fallen slip. This is unusual for the known necropolises from the Varna or Kodjadermen-Gumelnitsa-Karanovo VI cultures. It was possible that the skeletons were from a later necropolis and the ceramics from a settlement. A schema of the location of the various clusters of ceramics within the destroyed necropolis was made. After that the fragments were collected and determined chronologically. This resulted in a map of the dispersion of ceramics from different ages in the tilled area, which gave an approximate idea of the location of the presumptive necropolises and of the places where the graves are completely destroyed (where the most ceramics and bones were found).

Several small trenches were dug in different places. It was established, that the land that now seems level was leveled later in a humus forming process and by agricultural machines. The base is of a sandy rock, which is covered with different amounts of dirt and humus in different places. In some places, the rock starts at only 40 cm depth, at others at over 1.70 m.

In only one of the trenches, in the periphery of the tilled area, two partially preserved graves were found. They were at a depth of about 35-40 cm under the present-day surface.

Two of the trenches reached a sterile clay soil and no structure was found there. In another trench, part of a pit was uncovered, which contained a lot of secondary burnt early eneolithic ceramics, animal bones and parts of burnt clay walls. During the following year's excavations (2011) a trench 5 m by 10 m was made in an area unaffected by the deep agricultural tillage, about 300 m from the first two discovered graves. It was dug close to an area with a small quantity of eneolithic ceramics on the surface in the hope to find whole structures. The choice turned out to be adequate and four graves from the late Eneolithic period were found. Despite the necropolis being in a field which has undergone multiple tillage by heavy machinery, all trenches were dug by hand with the traditional for archeological excavations instruments. This allowed some interesting observations of the layer above the grave pits.

**Studied graves.** Grave No. 1 is partially destroyed by the tillage — it is partially in the deeply, partially in the shallowly tilled area (Fig. 2/1). The sharp part of the plow has cut the grave pit, but part of it has remained unaffected. In the deeply tilled portion, bones from hands, chest, pelvis and thighs were found. Also found were thirteen mushroom-shaped bone items with a hole on the thinner part of each, probably for hanging or tying together (Fig. 2/2). The bone items are approximately the same size — their length varies between 2 and 2.5 cm. The rest of the skeleton was found complete. It was established, that the funeral was in a pit, dug about 5-10 cm into the sandy rock. Its bottom is 45 cm under the present-day surface and it is unclear whether this is the level on which it began. Undisturbed by the tillage parts of a skeleton were discovered — parts of a skull, a left shoulder joint and the shins and feet. The general orientation is southeast (head) — northwest. Next to the skull and between the legs were small pieces of red ochre. Those were present in the dirt with the destroyed bones. As far as can be judged by the bones preserved in situ, the body was laid on its back with knees bent and legs fallen to the right.

Grave No. 2 was found to the south of grave No. 1. It was also partially destroyed by the tillage (Fig. 2/1). Preserved from it were the chest bones, the arms and thighs, two teeth and some small skull fragments, roughly in the place, where the head would be. The skeleton is in a half bent to the left position. The orientation is northeast-southwest. Small pieces of red ochre were found in the soil around and over the skeleton. Among the bones from the chest, a fragment of thin tubular bird bone with a small hole was found. It is possible that this was part of a whistle (flute), broken by the tillage.

As far as can be judged by the funerary rites — body laid on its back, with bent legs, without a mound, placement of pieces of red ochre in the grave and inventory — bone jewelry, part of a «flute», these graves are probably from the end of the late Eneolithic period and the beginning of the transition period to the Bronze Age. There are similar inventories in the graves from the necropolises of the Hvalinsk culture. Probably they are relatively simultaneous with the «zoomorphic scepters».

Graves No. 3-6 (Fig. 3/1). These four graves are from the 2011 sounding. In the upper layer, which is plowed every year, at a depth of up to 45 cm from the present-day surface, there were few ceramic fragments from classical antiquity, made on a potter's wheel. In a layer of 50-60 cm below the present-day surface, near the graves and partly above them, there were small pilings of ceramic fragments from the Late Eneolithic: parts from a clay strainer and separate fragments of vessels. They lie in a dark stratum in which there are no materials more recent than the Eneolithic. Under the dark stratum, at a depth of 95-120 cm, three well-preserved graves were found, dug into light clayish soil (grave No. 3, grave No. 4 and grave No. 5). An adult individual was buried in each of these three. At a depth of 50-65 cm from the present-day surface, at the boundary between the dark and the light stratum, immediately under and partly to the side of a large piling of ceramic fragments, a poorly preserved skeleton of a child was found (grave No. 6). The bones were lying partly in anatomical order. It is possible that they were disturbed much later than the burial by the roots of vines which were grown in this area and were uprooted about 30 years ago. At the three well-preserved graves (Nos. 3-5) the pits were difficult to distinguish from the surrounding terrain, but their contours were visible at the level of the graves. The ancient terrain in which these graves were dug was probably at a depth of 50-60 cm from the present-day surface, the level of the pilings. Therefore, the depth of the burial pits of the three adult burials was 50-70 cm. The child burial was significantly shallower, at about 20 cm under the conjectured surface.

All four skeletons are in the hocker position, oriented east (the head) to west. Two of the adult individuals were laid on their left sides and one was laid on the right side. According to the initial evaluation by anthropologist Dr. V. Ruseva, one of the left-lying hockers was male, and the other two, a left-lying hocker and a right-lying hocker, were female. The bones from the child burial are quite disturbed and destroyed and the exact position is difficult to establish. In each of the three graves of adult individuals there was a small unbaked biconical vessel, placed next to the head with its mouth up, and in two of them besides the small vessel there were large baked vessels, bowls and plates, placed next to the head or

on the body. After they were washed, it was established that they were baked non-uniformly, at a low temperature, and some parts of them remained unbaked. A massive, roughly retouched flint flake was found in one of the graves after the skeleton was removed. Even though the vessels from the graves have not yet been restored, they can definitely be determined to be from the Late Eneolithic.

Among the objects from the piling above the child grave, besides fragments of at least three different vessels, there were animal bones, three astragali of varying dimensions and from different animals, and a leg from a little clay altar, ornamented with cut-in lines (Fig. 3/2). Apparently this, as well as the other smaller pilings, are remnants of rituals performed in the necropolis after the burials above or next to the covered graves. In this regard we can conjecture that a significant part of the Eneolithic pottery that came to the surface after deep plowing were remains of such rituals and some of the graves remained untouched. It is probable that fragments of ritual objects found on the surface after deep plowing: a sitting clay zoomorphic figurine (Fig. 1/4), a part of a plate (altar), decorated with an anthropomorphic figurine that sticks up from the rim of the mouth (Fig. 1/3); and three-dimensional zoomorphic decoration of a larger ceramic object (Fig. 1/2), similarly to the altar leg from the piling above the child grave, were also part of rituals performed after the burials and left at the level of the terrain of the Eneolithic necropolis.

**Conclusions.** Exploring the necropolis is in its initial phase and the number of discovered graves is still small. From the information collected so far, presented here in summary, it can be seen that there are two ritual and possibly cultural-chronological groups among the prehistoric graves, which at this stage appear to be clearly distinguishable within the area of the necropolis. They exhibit a similarity only as far as orientation, which is east-west for all discovered graves.

The two later graves, No. 1 and No. 2, definitely have a different ritual from the one characteristic of the Late Eneolithic cultures from Thrace, the Black Sea region, and the Lower Danube. Burials with legs bent at the knees, lying on the back, without a tomb mound, placing of pieces of red ochre in the grave, presence of bone objects in the grave such as pendants or buttons and a "flute", absence of ceramic objects represent a ritual which has an analogy in the Eneolithic necropolises at Khvalinks culture<sup>6</sup>. Chronologically they should be related to the time of the "zoomorphic sceptres" or the beginning of the transition from the Eneolithic to the Bronze Age. A find of a bone spoon decorated with a very precise imitation of a zoomorphic sceptre, found during underwater exploration of the Eneolithic settlement at Sozopol, allowed the clarification of the relative chronology of the cultures where zoomorphic sceptres are found. This is the final phase of the Eneolithic cultures for the west Black Sea region and Thrace<sup>7</sup>. It is not clear to what extent these two graves are the only such ones or are a part of a larger group. It is possible that they are related to the ceramic finds made from clay tempered with ground clam shells (the so-called type C ceramics), from the uppermost burned Late Eneolithic layer of the tell<sup>8</sup>, but it is also possible

<sup>6</sup> AGAPOV, VASSILEV, PESTRIKOVA 1990, p. 83-85 ; AGAPOV 2010, p. 37- 38.

<sup>7</sup> GEORGIEVA 2005; DIMITROV 2007.

<sup>8</sup> GEORGIEVA 2003, p. 219, fig. 13/8, p. 223-224.

that they are more recent. In all cases they are related to the "immigrants" from the steppes.

The other four graves are characteristic of the classical Eneolithic of the farming and stock-breeding population of the Balkans. In the graves discovered so far, the burial ritual is rather different from the one characteristic of the Varna culture. The ritual observed in the newly-found graves has its own specifics: pilings of fragments and animal bones next to the grave at the level from which the grave pits were dug; placing of large, though poorly baked vessels in the grave; placing of the body in a bent position oriented east-west. Even though it is too early for generalizations at this stage, it is possible to state that the finds do not support the existing hypothesis about the Varna culture extending territorially to the south of Stara Planina.

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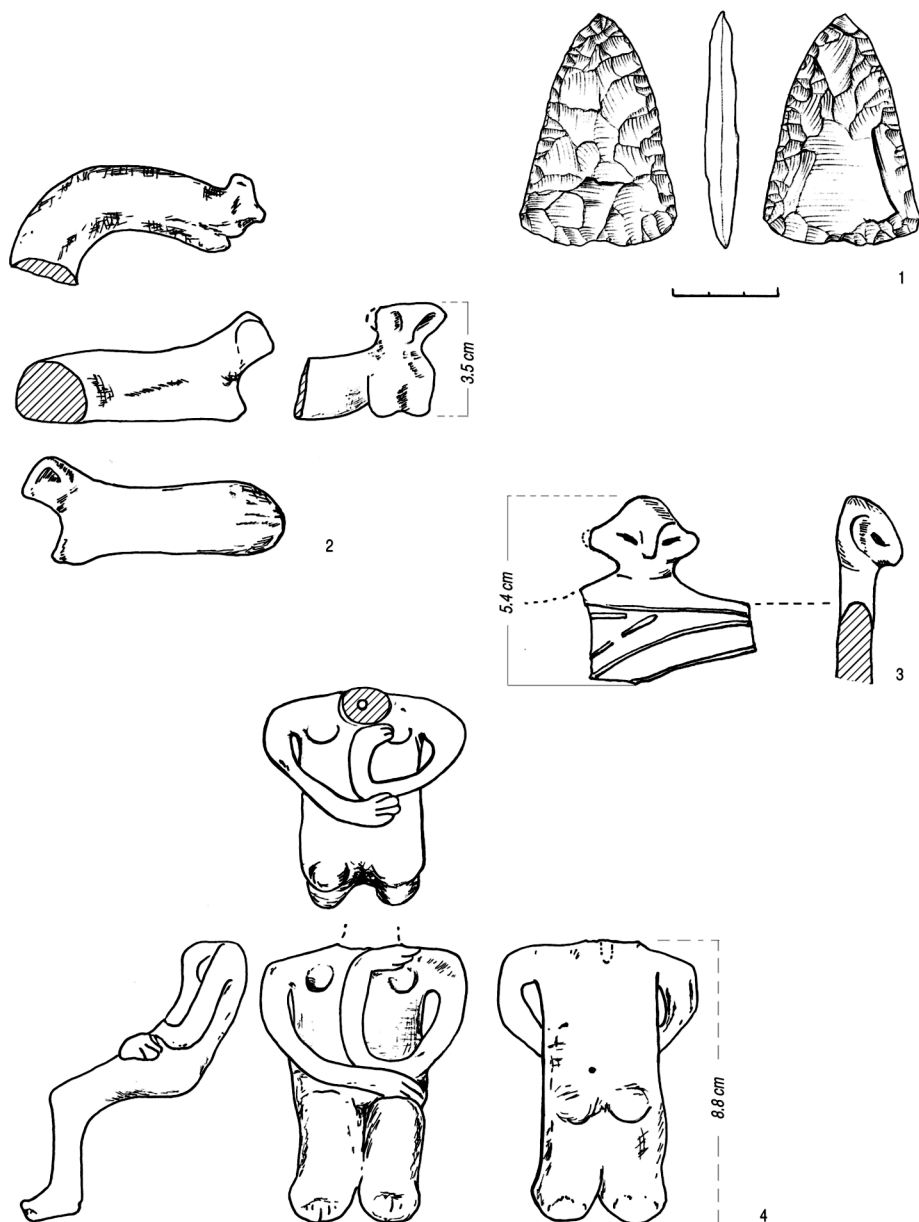
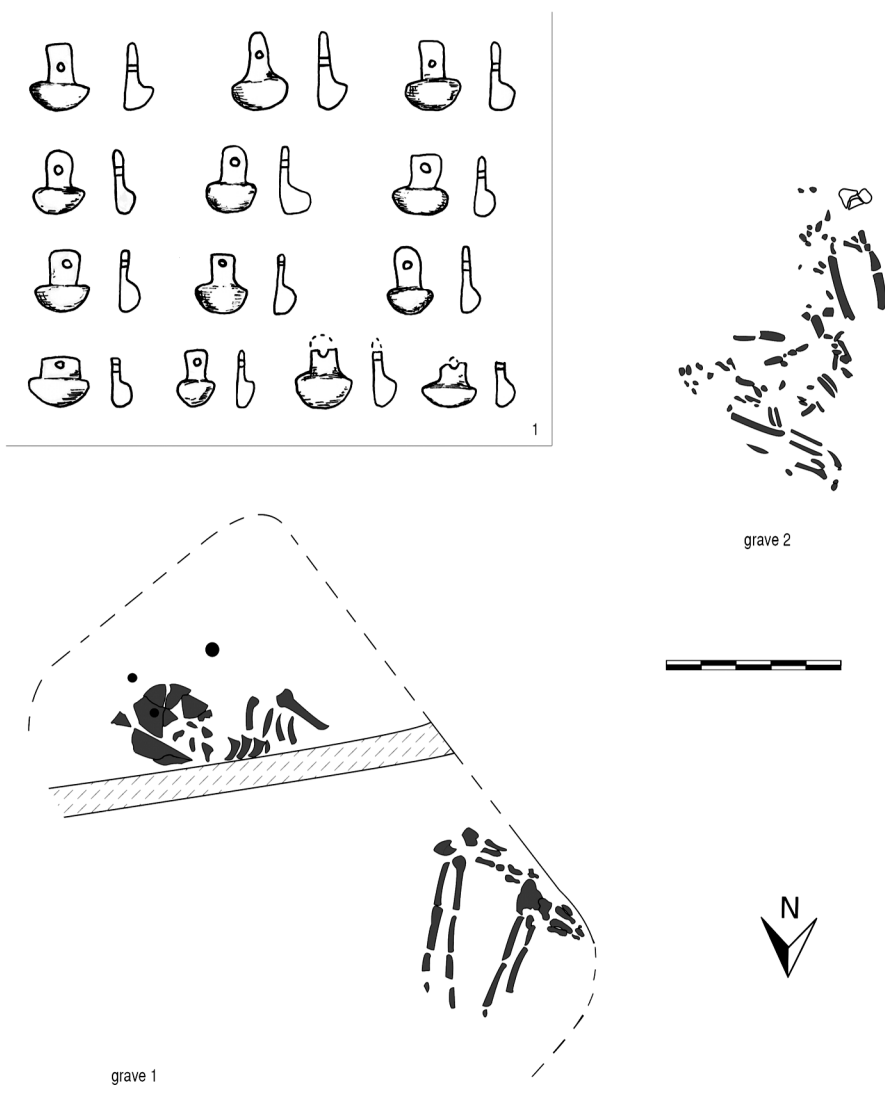


Fig. 1 - Finds gathered from the surface: a flint point (1), a zoomorphic figurine (2), part of a ceramic altar with anthropomorphic decoration (3), a ceramic anthropomorphic figurine (4).



**Fig. 2 - General plan of graves No. 1 and 2 (1).  
Jewelry / bone buttons from grave No. 1.**

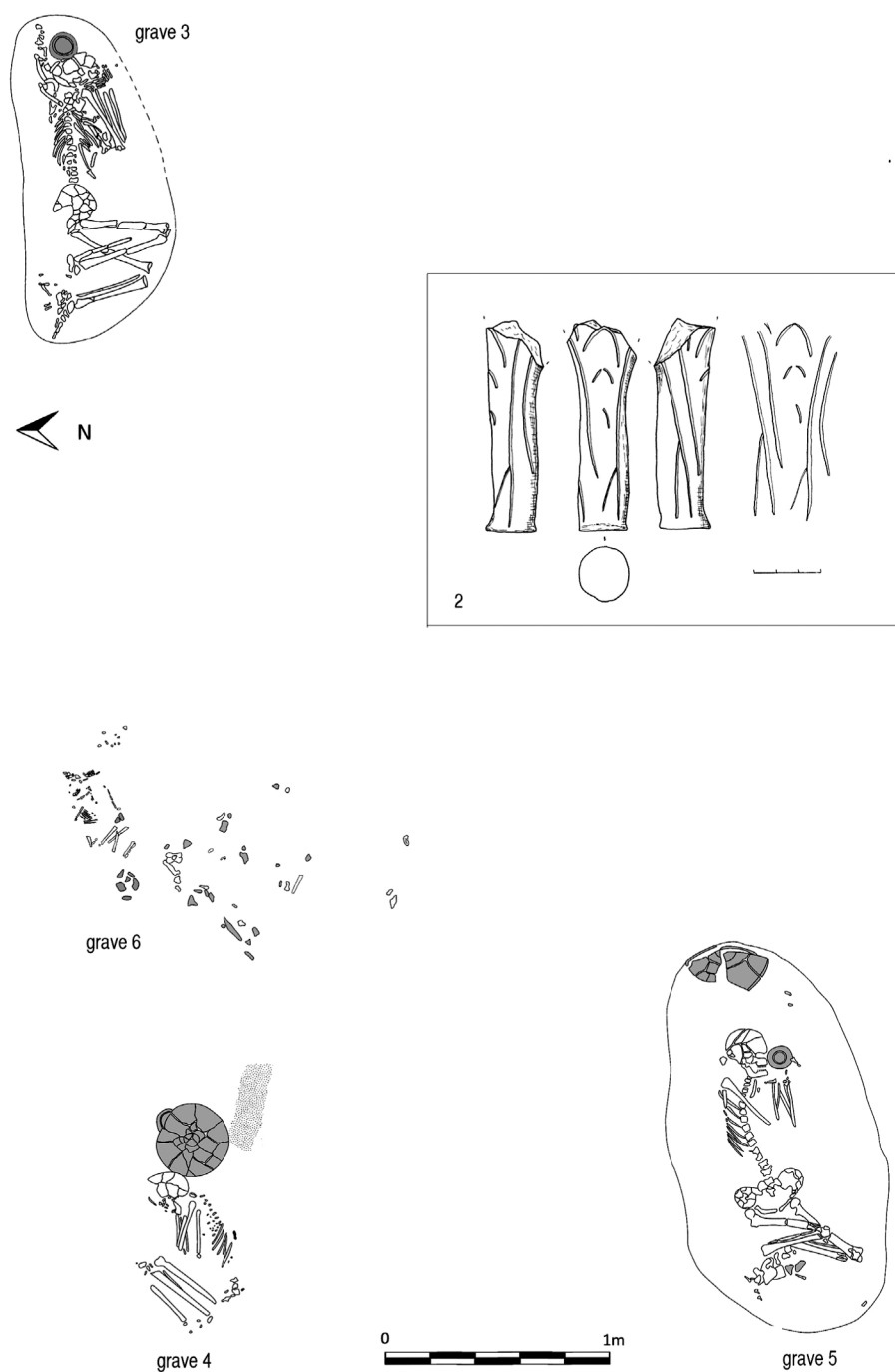


Fig. 3 - General plan of graves No. 3 - 6 (1).  
A leg of a ceramic altar from the cluster above grave No. 6 (2).