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## BRONZE AGE BURIALS AT TQEMLARA

The Tqemlara kurgan field is situated in Tetritsqaro district, Kvemo Kartli, on the south-western side of Mount Bedeni, south of the river Chivchavi. It slopes north-west to south-east. There is a small Medieval church east of the plain, and the Medieval settlement of Tqemlara lies to the north-east and is bordered by a railway. Currently its greater part is situated in the area of the No. 2 oil pumping station of the BTC pipeline.

In 1987-1988 the Marabda-Akhalkalaki Expedition of the Centre for Archaeological Research directed by Z. Shatberashvili investigated two kurgans of the Early Bronze Age in this area (Shatberashvili 1997: 63-65). During construction of the BTC pipeline in 2002-2003 on land projected for the oil pumping station, excavations were carried out on the Tqemlara field by the Tetritsqaro Expedition of the Centre for Archaeological Research directed by Z. Shatberashvili. Their object was to investigate several Bronze Age burials which had hitherto escaped notice because their low height meant they were hardly visible from the north-west, having succumbed to land slips on that side. The kurgans stood in clusters and some were connected to each other by low stone paths. In 2002 five kurgans and a connecting path between them were excavated (Shatberashvili 2003) and in 2003, two kurgans and two pit graves overlaid by stone mounds (Shatberashvili et al. 2005). The burials were labeled with separate field numbers each season. In the present article we decided to simplify matters and to give them a fresh enumeration. Nos 1 and 2 are the kurgans excavated in 1987-1988; Kurgans Nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 excavated in 2002 are now 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (Nos 5, 6, and 7 were small and empty). The burials investigated in 2003 were Kurgans Nos 13 (it was badly damaged and, presumably, robbed) and 16, but now Nos 8 and 9; pit graves Nos 1 and 2 are now Nos 10 and 11.

Kurgans on Tqemlara field had been built at two different periods, in the Early Bronze Age and at the end of the Middle Bronze Age.

Before describing the burials investigated during pipeline construction, we will briefly discuss Kurgans Nos 1 and 2 excavated in 1987-1988. Both had stone mounds built over them and were not very large; their greatest diameter was 15 m; the pits were oval (No. 1: 3.5 x 3.8 m 1.5 m deep; No. 2: 3.8 x 3.6 m). The stone mound over Kurgan No. 1 had been almost completely removed. In the filling of both kurgans obsidian flakes were found.

Kurgan No. 1 contained: 1. A handled pot, black-burnished, thin-walled, brownish-grey fabric, cylindrical neck, spherical body (pl.I, 2); 2. A handled mug, black-burnished, brownish-grey fabric, cylindrical neck, spherical body, three lateral grooves at junction of neck and shoulder (pl. I, 4); 3. A handled mug, black-burnished, grey fabric; bi-conical body (pl. I, 3); 4. A mug, black-burnished, brownish-grey fabric, fragment of neck surviving (pl. I, 5); 5. A mace head, sandstone, pear-shaped (pl. I, 1).

Kurgan No. 2 contained: 1. A large two-handled pot, black burnished, reddish interior, bi-conical body; the shoulder decorated with hatched triangles and herring-bone ornament (pl. I, 6); 2. A large pot, fired grey, bi-conical body, two lateral grooves on the shoulder (pl. I, 8); 3. A pot, grey fabric, bi-conical body, handle modelled on the shoulder; two zigzag lines between two grooves on the shoulder (pl. I, 7); 4. A small handleless pot, pink, broad body (pl. I, 9).

Kurgan No. 3 (No. 1 of 2002) is circular and overlaid with a stone and earth mound; diameter 22.5 m, 1.4 m. A stone circle (diameter 3.3m) is visible in the northern part. The stone mound produced the following: 233 obsidian flakes (8 retouched), 3 obsidian chips, 4 scrapers, 5 nuclei; 13 lamellae, a perforator, a side scraper, 7 burins, 8 chisel-like tools, a blade-like tool, 51 knives, and a knife flake. In the central part of the kurgan, at a depth of 1.4 m, there appeared in a black earth layer three fragments of burnished pottery with an obsidian admixture fired brown and black. There was no burial chamber found in the kurgan, and it must have lacked a pit.

Kurgan No. 4 (No. 2 of 2002) is circular and overlaid with a stone and earth mound; diameter 23m, greatest extant height of the mound 1.23 m (pl. II, 1, 2). It must have been built after Kurgan No. 3 (the eastern part overlies the latter). The stone mound was 0.3-0.4 m deep towards the edges, and 0.6-0.8 m in the centre (pl. II, 1, 2). A fragment of Medieval pottery was found in the humus layer of the kurgan. At a depth of 0.4-1.2 m beneath ground level, there emerged from the humus and the mound the following obsidian tools: 142 flakes, 19 chips, 21 nuclei, 24 lamellae, 24 retouched flakes, 7 chisel-like tools, 3 fishhook-like tools, 14 knives, 11 side-scrapers, 2 perforators, 2 burins, 13 scrapers, 1 arrowhead with an engraved base. An oval burial chamber (4.2 x 3.2 m, height 1.75m) cut in loam in the centre of the kurgan was, presumably, once roofed with timber covered with a course of stone and plastered with clay.

On top of the chamber, in its north-west part, there appeared a raised burial (estimated size, 1.5 x 1.2 m) (pl. II, 3). The deceased was buried lying on the left side with the head to the west. The head and part of upper extremities rested on yellow loam, while the lower extremities lay on the stone mound. The upper part of the skeleton was situated 0.3 m below the level of the mouth of the chamber, and the lower 0.5-0.6m below, and was angled towards the east. The bones were badly preserved.

In the raised burial there were: 1. A bronze dagger with a hoop, slanting shoulders and a slightly prominent ridge (pl. III, 4); 2. A sandstone axe, well worked, flattened butt, oval edge, sharp (pl. III, 6); 3. A ceramic mug, fired black, thin-walled, brownish interior, offset rim, almost cylindrical neck slightly broadened towards the spherical body, belly dramatically narrowed towards the flat base. The handle must have been modelled on the shoulder and body; a hole opposite the handle. A groove at the junction of the neck and shoulder (pl. III, 3); 4. A pot, fired black, polished exterior, brown interior and thin-walled. Offset rim, neck almost cylindrical broadening towards the spherical body. Shoulder and neck separated by a band dots between horizontal grooves. Hatched leaf-like projections and made up of small dots run down from the band towards the body (pl. III, 1); 5. A fragment of the neck and wall of a mug with an offset rim, black-burnished, with a yellowish-grey fabric. A thumb-print sized depression on the shoulder; grooves beneath (pl. III, 8). 6. Fragments of mugs with offset rims (from three vessels). Black-burnished, brownish-grey fabric. Neck almost cylindrical; two with handles between neck and shoulder (pl. III, 2, 5, 7).

The floor of the burial chamber (pl. II, 4, 5) was plastered with clay. In the centre, impressions of carbonized textile have survived. At 1.4 m above the bottom of the burial, a 0.6m wide platform was arranged along the walls, on the west side of which was found a leaf-like bronze knife. To the north and south of the floor two trenches were cut in bedrock  $(2.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.6 \text{ m})$ . There was the wheel and part of the axle of a wooden cart in each trench. Along the platform were several clay vessels, and large pots and mugs lay on the ditch and the floor. There were no traces of the deceased: it is perhaps significant that a part of the fragments of the pottery discovered on the chamber floor belonged to the inventory of the raised burial, while upper levels contained fragments of vessels discovered on the floor of the burial, likely pointers to the grave having been robbed.

The burial chamber included: 1. Fragments of a cart, the wood carbonized and turned to dust. The wheels and the axle were recorded, treated in the laboratory by Nino Kalandadze, and reconstructed by Nino Okruashvili (pl. II, 5). 2. Carbonized textile fragments. 3. A patinated leaf-shaped bronze knife, somewhat damaged (pl. III, 14); 4. A black-burnished mug of a brownish fabric; offset rim, bi-conical body, handle modelled on the shoulder; shoulder decorated with two bands of applied clay "pearls", a relief line between

them; a ridge on the body; flat base (pl. III, 12); 5. A large pot, pinkish-brown; offset, rounded rim, low neck, spherical body, rounded base (pl. IV, 2); 6. A large two-handled pot, blackish-grey, rounded rim, cylindrical neck, spherical body; handles square in section on shoulder; flat base; arched relief lines on either side of the handles with relief representations of coiled snakes between them. On one side, two knobs in relief from the snake heads to the handles (pl. IV, 1); 7. A large pot, greyish-black, with two handles, rounded offset rim, cylindrical neck, spherical body, narrow base; handles modelled on shoulder and body (pl. IV.); 8. A black-burnished one-handled pot, brown fabric; rounded offset rim, groove at neck; slightly convex body, bi-conical towards base, sharply recessed wall, flat base; handle modelled on the body; below the neck and above the ridge several rows of grooves running around the vessel; incised rhomboid motifs filled with net-like ornament (pl. III, 9); 9. A black-burnished pot, brown fabric, offset rim, almost cylindrical neck broadening towards the base, spherical body, narrow and flat base; handle modelled on shoulder and body; side ribbed, six grooves (pl. III, 10); 10. A black-burnished mug, brown fabric, offset rim, cylindrical neck, spherical body, flat base; handle modelled on neck and body; ribbed wall, grooves running around the neck and the body (pl. III, 14); 11. A black-burnished pot, offset rim, spherical body, two grooved lines on shoulder, beneath which are oblique hatchings; handle modelled on the shoulder (pl. III, 11); 12. A large two-handled pot, blackish-grey, with offset rim, cylindrical neck; slightly concave, spherical body, narrow base; high handles attached to the shoulder; six knobs in relief on the shoulder (pl. IV, 4).

Kurgans Nos 1, 2 and 4 produced objects of different materials and function. Most of the pottery from all three burials is fired black and is black-burnished, although a group of small vessels can be distinguished: mugs and pots diagnostic of the Bedeni Culture, refined, smooth and shiny, found in Kurgans Nos 1 and 4.

The mugs vary: 1. Mugs with a tall cylindrical neck and spherical body (pl. I, 2, Kurgan No. 1; pl. III, 13; Kurgan No. 4, main burial); 2. Mug with a low neck and spherical body (pl. III, 3, Kurgan No. 4, raised burial); 3. Bi-conical mug whose greatest diameter exceeds its height (pl. III, 12, Kurgan No. 4, main burial); 4. Mug with bi-conical body, long shoulder, short wall (pl. I, 4, Kurgan No. 1). All the above listed vessels are exclusively typical of Bedeni complexes (Gobejishvili 1981: 62:68; Dedabrishvili 1979: 44-47).

Pots are larger than mugs but are similar in shape: 1. The pot discovered in the raised burial of Kurgan No. 4 has a low, cylindrical neck and a spherical body (pl. III, 1); 2. an ornamented pot from the main burial of Kurgan No. 4 has a single handle, a slightly convex body, short wall and flat base (pl. III, 9); 3. Kurgans Nos 1 and 4 contained single-handled pots with cylindrical neck and spherical body (pl. I, 2; III, 10).

A single-handled pot with a bi-conical body, coarser than Bedeni ware, stands apart (pl. I, 7), and is of a kind less common in Bedeni complexes and is probably more typical of those of Martqopi type.

Two large bi-conical pots from in Kurgan No. 2 are diagnostic of Martqopi kurgans (pl.I, 6, 8). It was not possible to restore the shape of one of them, but parallels for the other are known from Kurgan No. 2 at Martqopi (Japaridze 1998: 15-16) and Kurgan 12 at Trialeti (Zhorzhikashvili, Gogadze 1974:55). The contents of Kurgan No. 2 at Tgemlara are thus Martqopian in character.

The other pots from Tqemlara come from Kurgan No. 4. The large pot which is fired pinkish-brown (pl. IV, 2) is interesting as it differs from the black-burnished production of Bedeni kurgans and is relatively rare in this cultural group of kurgans. We known of an exact parallel from Kurgan No. 10 at Bedeni (Gobejishvili 1979: pl. XXII), where again there are snakes in relief (pl. IV, 1; cf. pl. IV, 4).

Kurgans Nos 1 and 4 contained a sandstone mace-head, a perforated axe of the same material, a bronze dagger blade and a small bronze knife, and Kurgan No. 4 also had obsidian arrowhead with and engraved base. The pear-shaped mace head with a round hole for the handle found in the raised burial of Kurgan No. 4 must be a badge of office. Similar mace heads have been found in early kurgans: in Trialeti Kurgan 40 (Paravani No. 3) and in Sapitiakhsho (chance find) (Zhorzhikashvili, Gogadze 1974: 13, 59-60). Similar objects come from Martqopi Kurgan No. 5 (Bedeni type), Zalichi Kurgan No. 2, Anagi No. 1, and in kurgans at Stepanakert (Japaridze 1998: 115). Perforated stone axes are a rarity in Georgia. The closest parallel to the specimen found in the raised burial is one from Kurgan No. 1 at Martqopi (the earliest kurgan), just above

the chamber (Japaridze 1998:14). Similar axes are also known from North Caucasia (Munchaev 1961: 76), although they differ from ours in that their handle is higher up, closer to the butt. The bronze dagger blade from Kurgan No. 4 is closest to the weapon found in the Bedeni-type kurgan containing a cart at Bakurtsikhe (Pitskhelauri 1982: 18). The slanting shoulders and narrow head are the features that distinguish them from daggers found in early kurgans. A similar object was found in the Kenchiqara kurgan near the village of Khandaki, as yet unpublished (Z. Shatberashvili's excavations).

The most important characteristic feature of the Bedeni Culture kurgans, and one that distinguishes them fom other early kurgans, is the practice of depositing a wooden cart in a burial. In the principal burial of Kurgan No. 4 at Tqemlara fragments of a cart axle and wheels were recovered; the wood is carbonized and turned into dust, and thus it is difficult to restore its shape. It seems that what we have is part of a four-wheeled cart that was originally deposited in the tomb. Bedeni kurgans display both whole carts (e.g. Bedeni Kurgans Nos 5, 8, 10) (Gobejishvili 1981:42, 39, 99) and parts of carts (e.g. Tsnori Kurgans Nos 1 and 2) (Dedabrishvili 1979: 22, 40). It is noteworthy that palynological research showed that there was a large amount of plantain pollen on the wheel of the cart in Kurgan No. 4 at Tqemlara which points to the fact that the cart had been used in real life (Kvavadze 2003:6). The view has been expressed that the Bedeni and Trialeti carts only had a religious function, to be placed in burials (Japaridze 1981:99). The carts were presumably peculiar to Bedeni kurgans and the practice of depositing such vehicles was adopted by practitioners of the Trialeti Culture by inertia at an early stage. It should be noted Trialeti Kurgan No. 29, investigated by B. Kuftin, which used to be attributed to the Trialeti Culture (Zhorzhikashvili, Gogadze 1974: 22, 101-102), is in fact a Bedeni kurgan.

The area of Early Kurgan Culture in Georgia covers Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli and Kakheti. In general it is widespread over North-West Caucasia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The feature that brings together the Bedeni and the Martqopi groups of this Culture is an entirely new phenomenon for this region, namely, burial in the deceased in kurgans. There is, however, one significant difference in burial practice. Bedeni kurgans contain carts or stretchers, unknown in kurgans of Martqopi type. The pottery is also different: Martqopi kurgans contain large black two-handled pear-shaped pots with a bi-conical body, and also large, one-handled mugs that display a certain affinity with the pottery of the Kura-Araxes Culture (Japaridze 1992: 126). Bedeni pottery is refined, characterized by a thin, strong fabric, and an almost metallic lustre on the exterior (cf. material from Kurgan No. 4).

Chronological correlation between the Bedeni and Martqopi Cultures is a controversial matter. Some scholars regard Martqopi to be earlier than Bedeni, while others believe Bedeni is earlier. There is an opinion that the sites of Martqopi and Bedeni were contemporary with the final stage of the Kura-Araxes Culture (for bibliography, see Orjonikidze 2002: 23). Even sites which produced Kura-Araxes, Martqopi and Bedeni material did not seem to elucidate the problem. Dmanisi Kurgan No. 1 is relevant, in that the grave goods are close both to those of Bedeni and Martqopi (Kakhiani et al. 1991: 66). The Khovle kurgan is also interesting (Japaridze 1998: 148-150), where in the central part of the stone mound there were two raised burials arranged one on top of the other, and the principal burial had no grave goods. The pottery recovered in the lower burial No. 2 belonged to Bedeni Culture, while the upper Burial No. 1 has more of a Martqopi profile than Kura-Araxes characteristics (cf. Japaridze 1998:148-150).

Thus, the Kurgans Nos 1, 2, 4 with grave goods investigated in the Tqemlara valley belong to early kurgans: pottery of Kurgan No. 2 is of Martqopi type while Nos 1 and 4 are Bedeni-type complexes and it is difficult to estimate what the chronological difference between them might have been. All three date from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.

Excavations were resumed at Tqemlara in 2003, when the north-east part was investigated. Four burials were studied: two kurgans (Nos 8 and 9) and two pit graves (Nos 10 and 11).

Burial No. 10 (2003, No. 1) was a rectangular pit grave (1.1 x  $1.2 \times 0.4 \text{ m}$ ) with rounded corners cut into yellowish loam, whose stone circle had been disturbed. The skeletal remains were badly preserved but it

was possible to see that the deceased lay on the left side with the head to the north-east. There was a sheep placed in the burial at the north end (pl. V, 1). The burial contained: 1. A dark pot, of blackish-grey fabric, with a sand admixture; the neck is low, cylindrical, and the spherical body diminishes in diameter towards the flat base (pl. V, 3); 2. A dark pot, of a brownish fabric with a sand admixture; offset rim, low neck, separate spherical body, flat base (pl. V, 4); 3. Fragments of a ceramic vessel (jar); 4. A small hand-made pot, of brownish fabric, a knob on the surface (pl. V, 3); 5. A bronze pin with a pyramidal head, incomplete; 6. An obsidian knife; 7. Small white beads.

Burial No. 11 (No. 2 of 2003) is a pit grave with a stone mound (size: 1.80 x 1.20 x 0.50 m). A complete sheep's skeleton was found in the south-east corner and the ribs and skull of a bovine in the north-west. There were three broken ceramic vessels in the west. A bronze dagger blade with a hook lay above the cow's skeleton. Pottery fragments were revealed on the clay plastered floor (pl. V, 2). The burial produced: 1. A bronze dagger with a hook and a suspension hole in the handle (pl. V, 8); 2. A pot fired black, incomplete, brownish-black fabric with sand admixture; offset, rounded rim, cylindrical neck, spherical body diminishing in diameter towards the flat base; a groove at the junction of the neck and shoulder; on the shoulder incised inverted triangles (pl. V, 7); 3. A dark pot, blackish-grey fabric, with sand admixture; offset separate rim, narrow body, slightly convex wall, flat base; handle must have been modelled on neck and shoulder (pl. V, 6); 4. Fragments of dark pottery, reddish-brown fabric with sand admixture; similar to the last mentioned; 5. Similar potsherds found on the floor of the pit grave and also in the fill (probably from two or three vessels). Judging by the evidenceit would appear that Burial No. 11 had been robbed.

Kurgan No. 8 (2003/No. 13) had a pit and an earth and stone mound. It was damaged during construction work and only a part of the fill stone (3 x 2.8 m) and remains of an oval rock-cut chamber (1.2 x 0.75 x 0.25 m) were preserved; part of the cranium of a 14-16 year-old girl, fragments of a few ceramic vessels and a pierced sardonyx bead were found on the floor. The kurgan had been robbed.

Kurgan No. 9 (16) had a pit and an earth and stone mound. It was damaged during construction work; a round chamber cut in bedrock (1.9 x 1.65 x 0.74 m); the deceased was buried in the central part of the chamber (slightly eastwards), lying on the left; the complete skeleton of a sheep in front of the deceased (pl. VI, 1). The kurgan contained: 1. A bronze dagger; wide hoop, flat, engraved at the tip, broadening towards shoulders; three holes equidistant holes for attaching handle (pl. VI, 5); 2. Dark pot, rim missing; greyish-black; cylindrical neck, spherical body, flat base; triangles on shoulder (pl. VI, 4); 3. Dark pot, rim missing; pinkish fabric; cylindrical neck; groove at junction of neck and shoulder; spherical body; flat base; inverted triangles on the shoulder (pl. VI, 2); 4. A large dark bowl, fabric has a sand admixture; incurved, separated rim, convex shoulder, flat base (pl. VI, 3); 5. A brown hand-made drinking vessel, flat base (pl. VI, 7); 6. A small dark pot, reddish fabric with a sand admixture, round, offset rim, low neck, spherical body, flat base (pl. VI, 6); 7. A dark pot, brownish fabric with sand admixture and limestone insertions, offset flattened rim, low neck, shoulder ornamented with engraved dotted lines; 8. A dark pot, brownish fabric, offset, flattened rim, low neck, flat base; 9. A basalt lid with handle, bowl-shaped, flattened top, handle in form of a foot; perhaps a pestle (pl. VI, 8); 10. Temple pendant (?), bronze, ends open, round in section, damaged, broken into three parts, ends narrowed, diameter 3 cm; 11. Four bronze wire temple spirals; diameter 1 cm (pl. VI, 10); 12. Bronze pin in two fragments; 13. Bronze and sardonyx beads from a necklace 16 cm long; bronze bead 0.3-0.4 cm diameter; sardonyx bead 0.4 cm (pl. VI, 9); 14. White paste, circular and spherical beads, (pl. VI, 11).

The finds from the burials in the north-east part of the Tqemlara kurgan valley (pots decorated with chevrons, bronze daggers, etc.) are diagnostic of burials of the final stage of the Middle Bronze Age (Kalandaze 1980: fig. 18-19; Sadradze 1990: 657-660; Ramishvili 2004: 117, fig. 746) and must generally be dated to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. It is noteworthy that this material is close to that from contemporary sites at Shida Kartli.

Between the empty Kurgans Nos 5 and 6 there was a slightly raised paved stone path 24m long and 3 m wide. The surface was covered with obsidian tools and flakes. Narrow paths link Kurgans Nos 2 and 4

near Nadarbazevi, kurgans at Sapitiakhsho, Kushchi and Zurtaketi (Gobejishvili 1981: 8). The paths at Tqemlara, Nadarbazevi and elsewhere, are winding, and differ in this respect from the ritual roads of the Tsalka reservoir in Trialeti. The paths at Tqemlara and elewhere were used to link the kurgans, while Trialeti roads were designed as part of the burial construction and led in a straight line to the dromos (Narimanishvili 2003: 9-11).

In 2003 part of a path was excavated near Kurgan No. 8 datable to the end of the Middle Bronze Age. Unfortunately, the fill of this kurgan was badly damaged and it was therefore impossible to work out the precise relationship between the path and the kurgan. Unlike the ritual roads, therefore, it has so far not been possible to determine the function or date of these paths.

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## Illustrations:

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