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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE TOVUZCHAY II NECROPOLIS (AZERBAIJAN) IN 2014–2018 YEAR

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Tovuzchay II necropolis is located on the left higher bank of the Tovuzchay River in the Tovuz district in the west of Azerbaijan Republic. Archaeological excavations in the necropolis were conducted in 4 stages between 2014 and 2018. 135 graves and a place of worship were found in Tovuzchay II necropolis. The burials discovered in the necropolis were of two types: stone-covered and soil burials. These burials where archaeological materials and human burials are the same, differ only in structure and the top cover. The burial pits were dug in an oval, quadrangular forms. One of the interesting facts is that the place of worship in the necropolis was also discovered, and this area was probably the place where religious rituals were held. Only in 34 burials of the necropolis were human skeletons discovered. Rich archaeological material – pottery vessels, metal items for domestic use, jewellery, weaponry, beads made of different materials and other artefacts were found in the burials. According to the authors, the necropolis belongs to the culture Late Bronze-Early Iron culture (second half of the 2nd millennium-early 1st millennium BC).

Keywords: archaeology, Tovuzchay, necropolis, South Caucasus gas pipeline, Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, burials, archaeological excavations, artifacts, weapons, decorations..

Introduction

Archaeological explorations were carried out in the pipeline corridor prior to and during the construction of the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion Project (SCPX). During construction of the SCPX project, the Tovuzchay area was previously registered as an archaeological risk area, where archaeological excavations were planned. The necropolis discovered in the SCPX corridor, was called Tovuzchay II necropolis, as it is approximately 250–300 m from Tovuzchay I necropolis discovered on the BTC pipeline in 2003 (Najafov, 2012, p. 66).

Tovuzchay II necropolis site is located 3.5 km (kilometres) east of the city centre of Tovuz at KP358.250-350 of the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCPX) pipeline route (Najafov, 2019, p. 6). The necropolis is located between Bozalqanly and Alimardanly villages of Tovuz district, on the high left bank of the Tovuz River, at 380 m above sea lev-

el (fig. 1). The Tovuz River is 1km to the south and the site is on the upper edge of the valley where the broad piedmont surface descends into the deep valley bottom, with steep ridgelines and ravines. The surrounding area is used mainly for cultivation and pasture lands (fig. 1).

Archaeological excavations in Tovuzchay II necropolis

Archaeological excavations in Tovuzchay II necropolis were conducted in 4 stages between 2014 and 2018 (Najafov, 2019, p. 17).

During the Stage I investigation from 16 April to 1 July 2016, archaeologists excavated 104 burials.

Later during Stage II investigation in December 2016, an additional 8 locations were excavated, but only four contained skeletal remains. Though the other four did not contain skeletal remains, they did contained abundant artefacts and were interpreted as sacrificial altars.

Stage III of excavations in the necropolis was carried out from 21 June to



Fig. 1. The Tovuzçay archaeological site. General view.

Рис. 1. Общий вид археологического памятника Товузчай.

13 July 2017 when 15 burials were excavated. This followed excavation of the pipe trench by machine.

Stage IV of excavations in necropolis was carried out from 2 February to 3 March 2018 when 8 burials were excavated.

135 graves and the place of worship were found in Tovuzçay II necropolis (fig. 2). 94 of the burials were stone-covered, 26 were soil burial. As the remaining 15 burials (burials 105–119) were destroyed during excavation of the pipeline, their type could not be determined.

The area of the necropolis is 1–1.5 hectare. The gravel-and pebble-rich soil is unfit for cultivation. Therefore, the land has not previously been ploughed and the burials had not been disturbed prior to commencement of pipeline construction. The SCPX pipeline cut through the major portion of the necropolis. The surface markers of graves in the necropolis were represented by spreads of stones on the land surface. While some others lack surface markers altogether (Najafov, 2019, p. 17).

Burials

Some of the burials were excavated on the rocky soil of the hill. These burials were found at the highest point of the

sloping hill where the necropolis is located. The stone cover found of the burials at deeper layers remind the form of a kurgan cover, and the stones are reinforced with clay or mortar. The center of the necropolis is the highest point of the hill. The burials here are more dense and also shallow. The burial chambers found at the foot of the hill were laid in yellow clay soil and the earth was poured with gravelly soil. It sharply differs from the surrounding soil. In the upper center of the hill, on the contrary, the burials were dug in gravelly soil, and yellow clay was poured into the cell.

The burials discovered in Tovuzçay II necropolis are of two types: stone-covered and soil burials. These burials where archaeological materials and human burials are the same, differ only in structure and the top cover. The burials were dug in an oval, quadrangular forms (fig. 3). One of the interesting facts is that the place of worship in the necropolis was also discovered, and this area was probably the place where religious rituals were held.

Only in 34 burials of the necropolis were human skeletons discovered. In burial No. 100, there are signs of two human skeletons (Najafov, 2019, p. 64).

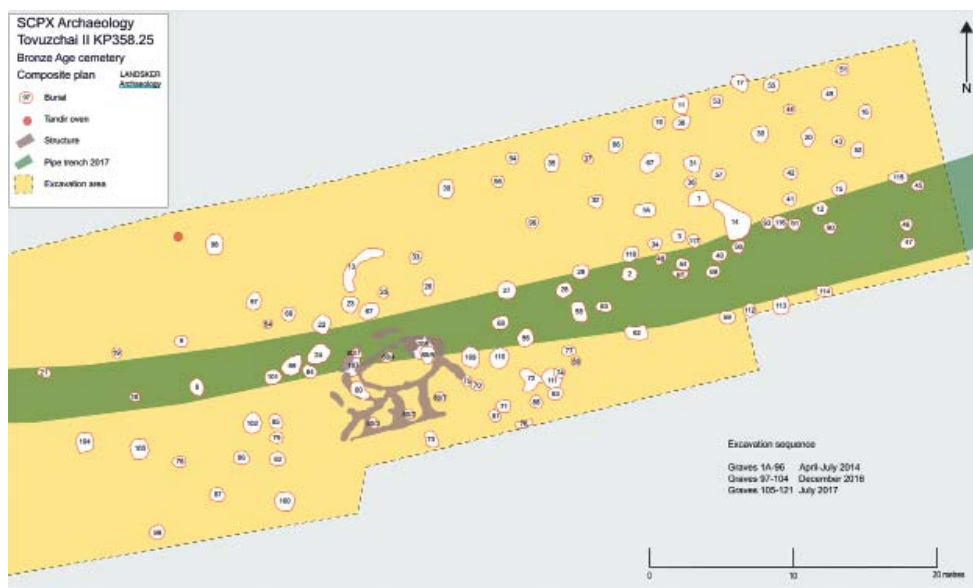


Fig. 2. General plan of Tovuzchay II necropolis.

Рис. 2. Генплан 2-го Товузчайского некрополя.

In the burials, where human burials were performed the deceased was placed in a crouched position on his left or right side. The archaeological material of all types of burials is identical and is represented by ceramic dishes, weapons, decorations. The question, along with graves filled with river stone, why there are graves with sand and soil filling remains open. This is not due to a lack of stone material, since the nearby river provides an almost inexhaustible resource of this material.

Considering that soil burials with river stone filling, resembling kurgans in structure, were constructed for wealthy and noble members of society, is doubtful, since the burials goods of a number of earth burials are richer and more diverse than some graves with stone filling.

The structure and features of burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis differ significantly from other burials in soil burials and stone boxes of the Late Bronze and

Early Iron Age period known in the territory of Azerbaijan (Necefov, 2006, s. 30; Асадов, 2007, с. 136). Firstly, in contrast to stone boxes, these burials have no side walls and floors made of flat stones. They also do not have, masonry of vertically installed long stones with cromlechs, forming a concentric circle characteristic for stone boxes. Secondly, even in the earth burials from this burial ground, along with the earth filling of the burials, river stone is present, albeit in small quantities.

Burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis, in our opinion, would be correctly called burials with stone covering. Of course, construction of the burials with such a design and the use of river stone as a building material were associated exclusively with natural geographic conditions (fig. 3). This region lacks the necessary material in the form of flat stone slabs for building stone box-type burials. Therefore, cobblestone, that is abundant in the Tovuzchay river bed, was



Fig. 3. 1 – burial No. 50; 2 – burial No. 66; 3 – burial No. 80/5; 4 – burial No. 85.

Рис. 3. 1 – погреб. № 50; 2 – погреб. № 66; 3 – погреб. № 80/5; 4 – погреб. № 85.

used as a material for Tovuzchay burials (Данялов, 2005, с. 88).

Burials similar to Tovuzchay II necropolis are encountered only in Eastern Georgia, among the burials of the Madnischal necropolis, dating to the first phase of the Bronze Age (14th–13th centuries B.C), as well as among the burials of the Mtskheta necropolis of the same epoch (Тушушвили, 1972). In Eastern Georgia, at different times, about a hundred burials of the Late Bronze period were investigated. None of these, with the exception of the two graveyards mentioned above, showed burials similar to those of Tovuzchay. It should be noted that the cover of the Madnischal graves from the river stone is not high. M.N. Tushishvili considers these burials of Madnischal necropolis as soil burials with stone covering (Тушушвили, 1972, с. 167–169). It cannot be said about the

graves of the Tovuzchay burials with stone fillings. Here stone fillings are not just a primitive embankment, but a kind of considered structure. Filling with river stones of these graves, dug in the ground, sand, and sometimes in a solid layer of rubble and pebbles, seems to be an integral element of burial traditions.

Several types of stone arrangement have been encountered in burials with stone fillings. Stone arrangement of some graves, both the top and lower floor has quadrangular and oval shapes. It is not exceptional that these stone coverings made of stones laid vertically on each other, are associated with canonized elements of the burial customs. Occasionally there were such burials in which the upper layers of stone coverings are quadrangular, and the lower, second or third layers of these coverings have rounded shapes. In any case, oval stone cover-



Fig. 4. Pottery

Рис. 4. Керамические сосуды

ings prevail. On the other hand, it should be noted that in the burials with clearly fixed grave chambers the circumference of stone settings does not correspond to the size of the grave chamber. In some cases, these settings of large and small river stone may extend beyond the grave chambers, sometimes correspond to them or even are smaller than them.

Artifacts collection and analysis

Artifacts recovered during excavations were collected and placed in plastic bags by provenience (e.g. burial No.). Artifact types collected included ceramic vessels and sherds; beads, and metal objects. Faunal material (animal bones and teeth) were documented in the field through digital photographs, drawings, forms and narrative notes, but were not collected for curation.

The archaeological material recovered from Tovuzchay II necropolis can be divided into three groups according to their function and work principle: domestic items, weaponry and jewellery. Domestic items are repre-

sented by pottery ware that includes differently shaped and sized platters, cooking-pots, jugs, bardags, kuzas, dopus (fig. 4). Weapons are indicated by spearheads and arrowheads. Jewellery items are also numerous and varied. All these materials attest to a certain degree of development of arts and crafts, including pottery making, metal-working and jewellery making in the life of early communities inhabiting the Tovuzchay river basin (Гусейнов, 2008, с. 155). Pottery, weaponry and jewellery revealed by the excavations show mutual development of these crafts and serve as a source in dealing with economic research issues.

Ceramic artifacts were subject to extensive documentation and analysis in the field. After the vessels were removed from the burial the sherds were washed, dried, and recorded in an artefact catalogue. In addition to collecting whole or nearly complete vessels, rim sherds, base sherds, and body sherds were collected and refitted in the field with the use of



Fig. 5. Zoomorphic ceramic

Рис. 5. Зооморфная керамика

glue. The more complete vessels were documented, photographed, and drawn. Where possible, the reassembled vessels were returned to the burial location and included in the photographic and sketch drawing of the exposed burials.

Ceramics occupy the main place among the grave goods in the burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis, both numerically and in a variety of forms and functional purposes. The vessels were usually placed in the grave around the corpse. Sometimes ceramic vessels are encountered one on the other. It is possible that the number of vessels in the burials is related with the social and material position of the buried person in his life time.

With the exception of a small number of vessels, most of the ceramic products were wheel-made. Most of the ceramic vessels were made of clay by adding fine and coarse sand.

In general, vessels making up the main part of the ceramic material in the burials for purpose of use can be divided into two groups: household and kitchen items (Najafov, 2019, p. 86).

The pottery samples revealed in graves of Tovuzchay II necropolis are different in typology and ornamentation. The degree of preservation of these vessels in the burials is also different.

The vessels of household purposes falling to the first group are represented mainly by samples of black and dark grey pottery vessels thrown in the potter's wheel (fig. 4). They constitute the bulk of the goods revealed in the burials. This group includes zoomorphic ceramic and vessels with a wide or spherical body (fig. 5). They can be with handles or without them. In some cases, at the base of the neck or humeral part of the vessels there are rounded and semi-rectangular protrusions. They are represented by pots, jugs, cups, bowls, etc. The vessels of this group are very characteristic for the ceramic material of Khojaly-Gedabey culture (Najafov, Agalarzade, 2015, p. 301).

The pottery of Tovuzchay II necropolis in the second group includes a small number of deep bowls, pots and coppers. The clay composition of these vessels contains a lot of sand admixture.

All mentioned types of ceramic items were widely used in everyday life and in economic activities by the population of the Tovuzchay basin. Their shapes and sizes give a clear idea about the scope of their use. In everyday life, they served to store water and food, to cook, to make butter, to keep milk, grain, and for other household purposes.



Fig. 6. Dagger.

Рис. 6. Кинжал.

Weapons occupy one of the main places among the grave inventory of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis (fig. 6–7). Most of the weapons were metal samples. Bronze arrowheads (fig. 7.2) were leaf-shaped and belonged to the arrowheads of the South Caucasian type (Najafov, 2019, p. 83). The daggers (fig. 6) found in the burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis can be divided into one group. The group includes daggers with a flattened handle, designed to insert the wooden handle in them and ending with dome-shaped lattice-head.

In the burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis, a large number of various ornamental items of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age were discovered. They were made of various materials. The functional purpose of the artifacts is determined by its location in the burial chamber, in

particular, in one or another part of the skeleton. As a rule, they were placed on the head, neck, chest and waist parts of the deceased, as well as on the bones of the hand and fingers.

The head decorations revealed in Tovuzchay II necropolis are represented by diadems, forehead plates, earrings, pendants and hair-designed bronze hollow tubes. Earrings are the most common head decorations. Based on the forms, they can be divided into two groups: ring-shaped and cone-shaped earrings. Zoomorphic pendants are presented in the form of goats and birds, and the bronze, wire made pendants round in cross section, in the form of a snake. Disc-shaped pendants with tracery cuts are made of thin bronze leaves. Among the decorations intended for decorating clothes, there are also bronze leaves of discoid forms. In the burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis, there are also pendants in the shape of a crescent or horseshoe.

Beads revealed in large numbers in the burials of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age necropolis are represented by items of agate, glass, bone, paste, metal, seashells. At the same time, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of the beads revealed in the burials of this graveyard are represented by samples made from paste. A significant part of

Fig. 7. Weapons: spearhead & arrowhead.

Рис.7. Оружие: наконечник копья и наконечник стрелы.



these paste beads has a tubular shape and are made by cutting from one long tubular billet.

Interpretation of excavation results

Burial chambers of Tovuzchay II necropolis were located at different depths. Most of the graves were discovered at a depth of 0.5 to 1.2 meters from the surface. The deepest grave was at a depth of more than 2 meters, and the closest ones were at a depth of only 10 cm and 20 cm.

Tovuzchay II necropolis may possibly have belonged to the inhabitants of a settlement located nearby. Although the associated settlement site was not discovered during research on the burial site, it could tentatively be presumed that the settlement site of this fairly sizable necropolis was situated in the neighboring vicinity and the lifespan of the settlement was relatively long, perhaps 5 or 6 centuries. The archaeological material recovered from the necropolis indicates that the site was used for 5–6 centuries.

The burials at Tovuzchay II necropolis were very densely spaced and each had an individual burial chamber. The difficulty in identifying the edges of burial chambers was related to a single factor – soil characteristics of the necropolis. The burial chamber dug in the natural gravel layer was backfilled with brought-in yellow, clayey soil. Sometimes it was difficult to define the exact edges of the burial chambers backfilled with the same gravelly soil material. The graves at the necropolis were constructed on the same principle and covered, depending on the size of the burial, with river-washed stones, gravel-rich and sandy soil layer.

No regularity was observed with respect to the burial depth at Tovuzchay II necropolis. The burials were unearthed at different depths. In some cases the difference in depths may have been conditioned by soil properties and difficulty

in digging. The majority of burials at the necropolis were exposed at depths between 50 cm and 120 cm.

Part of the burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis was dug in an east to west alignment. But this is not an obligatory factor, since graves in the north to south, northwest to southeast, and northeast and southwest orientation are also encountered. In burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis, women were buried on the left, and men on the right sides. Such a situation at one time was also recorded by researchers at Tli necropolis in Georgia (Техов, 1977, с. 65). At the same time, on a number of burial grounds of Georgia and the North Caucasus, such as the Samtavr, Nalchik burial, the Qatin-Kala necropolis and others, men were buried on the right, and women on the left sides (Ломтатидзе, 1955, с. 49; Техов, 1977, с. 65). The same picture is recorded in the burials of Koban culture in the North Caucasus as well (Козенкова, 2013).

For some of the burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis, the presence of grave equipment is characterized by the absence of a skeleton. There is quite extensive information on this, at first glance, strange burial custom and its interpretation in the archaeological literature. It should be noted that this burial custom, in this case, the burial of equipment without a corpse, was especially widely observed in the burials of Tovuzchay II necropolis (Najafov, 2019).

Although burials without a corpse in Tovuzchay II necropolis are numerous, there are various items of grave goods in all the burials. Even in the burial, where there were 10 ceramic vessels, numerous beads of various types and bronze ornaments, the skeleton was missing. No cremation traces were recorded in these graves, which could explain the absence

of bone remnants. It should also be noted that among the burials with a large and diverse grave inventory, burials where no traces of the skeleton, are predominant. At the same time, in terms of form, stone or earth fillings and inventory these burials are similar to the graves with skeletons.

The Late Bronze-Early Iron Age Tovuzchay II necropolis is a monument of the era of accelerated development of the production means and a sharp increase in the processes of ownership and social stratification of society. This monument, which is very interesting for study of the socio-economic and spiritual history of the Azerbaijani people's ancestors, also makes it possible to trace the key processes that took place in the life of society. Due to large-scale excavations of Tovuzchay II necropolis, scientific interest in the study of the burial sites of the Late Bronze and Early Iron epochs in the Tovuzchay river basin, the establishment of burial types, their chronological frameworks and burial traditions, has increased strikingly. In this regard, today the study of burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis is considered by archaeologists to be a rather topical scientific problem.

Dating and chronology of Tovuzchay II necropolis

Archaeological goods characteristic for the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (second half of the 2nd millennium-early 1st millennium BC) were found in the necropolis. The jaw bones of human skeleton discovered in two burials of the necropolis – in graves 106 and 107, have been subjected to radiocarbon analysis at the Beta Radiocarbon Analysis Laboratory of the United States and the absolute age of the necropolis was defined.

Radiocarbon analyzes on several burials (No. 106 & 107) played a major role

in establishing a scientifically reliable chronological framework of the burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis. Despite the small number of these radiocarbon dates, they still help to create an overall picture of dating of the necropolis.

Consistent analyses from the mentioned burials showed that the continuous burial process at Tovuzchay necropolis had lasted for 5–4 centuries. So burial No. 106 gave a calibrated date of 992–830 Cal BC (tab. 1) and burial No. 107 with stone filling – between 895–798 Cal BC (tab. 1). It appears from the above data that Tovuzchay II necropolis dates back to the end of the 11th century BC and the final stage of its use by the end of the 9th century BC.

It should be noted that the radiocarbon analyses practically completely coincide with the proposed chronology for this burial ground, made on the basis of a study of the technological, typological, artistic and other features of the ceramic material (Najafov, 2019).

Archaeological materials of Tovuzchay II necropolis belong to the Khojaly-Gedebey archaeological culture.

Conclusions

Similar burials have been found at Tovuzchay I necropolis (Museyibli & etc., 2008). Isolated burials like the ones excavated at KP 358.250–350 were identified during preconstruction surveys and excavations during the BTC and SCP projects. The artefact assemblages and burial methods at KP 358.250–350 are similar to other burials documented at Tovuzchay II necropolis. The age of the burial complex dates to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Ages, or the end of II millennium B.C-beginning of I millennium.

All Late Bronze-Early Iron Age grave monuments of the Tovuzchay river ba-

Table 1

Radiocarbon date of 2nd Tovuzchay necropolis
Радиоуглеродная дата 2-го Товузчайского некрополя

Feature	Number	BETA	Conventional Age	Calendar Calibration (95.4% probability)	Material
Burial 106	SCPX Sample 37	483547	2760 +/- 30 BP	95.4% probability (94.9%) 980 - 830 cal BC (2929 - 2779 cal BP) (0.5%) 992 - 989 cal BC (2941 - 2938 cal BP)	Tooth
Burial 107	SCPX Sample 40	483549	2670 +/- 30 BP	95.4% probability (95.4%) 895 - 798 cal BC (2844 - 2747 cal BP)	Tooth

sin are included in the Khojaly-Gedabey archaeological culture (Najafov, 2012). Just as in other regions of the western region of Azerbaijan, the burial monuments of Tovuzchay river basin of this period contain numerous artefacts among the grave goods characteristic of the Khojaly-Gedabey culture. These include household items, weapons and decorations. The studied monuments of the Tovuzchay basin, especially the burial grounds, and analysis of material culture objects discovered there allow us to establish continuity between the separate stages of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages, which are organically linked and chronologically complement each other.

The study of the burials in Tovuzchay II necropolis and their comparative analysis with other synchronous burial monuments confirmed once again not only the belonging of this monument to the agricultural and cattle-breeding population of this zone during the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages, but also provided an opportunity to get valuable factual data that would allow the proposal of scientifically sound hypotheses about religious beliefs and burial practices of

the population of the Tovuzchay river basin during the Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages.

Among the mentioned sites, the burials most similar to the burials at Tovuzchay II necropolis are those excavated at Zayamchay necropolis (Chalilov, 1982; Najafov, Hajili, 2005, p. 140). Although in strict chronological terms the Tovuzchay burials are 1–2 centuries earlier, there were no differences observed between these two either in terms of burial practices or grave goods. The burials at both Tovuzchay I and II and Zayamchay necropolises had the same construction styles. Like the Zayamchay necropolis, Tovuzchay I and II necropolis had both richly and poorly furnished common earth or stone-covered graves. No discernable variation in the depth and size of graves was recorded either.

All this suggests that the individuals buried at these necropolises were members of the same culture and shared the same worldview. Mutual relationships and cultural identity of various kins and tribes that took up a permanent abode and lived on this land for millennia were the basis upon which the new Khojali-Gedabey Culture was built.

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АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ РАСКОПКИ ВТОРОГО ТОВУЗЧАЙСКОГО НЕКРОПОЛЯ (АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН) В 2014-2018 ГГ.

Ш.Н. Наджафов, Д. Майнард

Некрополь расположен на высоком левом берегу ущелья реки Товузчай, в Товузском районе Республики Азербайджан. Археологические раскопки в некрополе проводились в 4 этапа с определенными перерывами в 2014–2018 гг. Во втором Товузчайском некрополе были обнаружены 135 погребальных памятников и одна могила. В некрополе обнаружены погребения двух типов: с каменным покрытием и грунтовые. Эти погребения, с идентичными археологическими материалами и человеческими за-

хоронениями отличаются лишь по структуре и верхнему покрытию. Погребальные ямы были вырыты в форме овалов и квадратов. Одним из фактов, вызывающих интерес, было то, что в некрополе обнаружена мошля и этот участок, скорее всего, являлся местом исполнения религиозных ритуалов. Лишь в 34-х погребениях некрополя обнаружены человеческие скелеты. В погребениях был найден богатый археологический инвентарь – гончарные сосуды, металлические изделия домашнего обихода, украшения, оружие, бусы из разных материалов и прочие артефакты. По мнению авторов, исследованный некрополь относится к эпохе поздней бронзы – раннего железа (вторая половина II тыс. – начало I тыс. до н. э.).

Ключевые слова: археология, Товузчай, некрополь, Южно-Кавказский газопровод, период поздней бронзы-раннего железа, погребальный памятник, археологические раскопки, артефакты, оружие, украшения.

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