

# PLOVDAG NECROPOLISES' FUNERAL RITE

## PLOVDAĞ NEKROPOLÜ'NÜN TUNÇ ÇAĞI MEZARLARI

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Azerbaijan, Nahçıvan, Plovdağ, Kurgan, Bronz Çağ

### ABSTRACT

*Excavations at the site of Plovdag began in 1986. Thirty-two Bronze Age burial mounds and a part of the settlement were examined in the three years. Excavations that restarted at the northern slope of mountain, after a long pause, in 2004, revealed a second necropolis covering an area of around 5 hectares. An Early Bronze settlement was discovered in the central part of necropolis under Middle and Late Bronze burial mounds.*

*On the second necropolis, there were examined 72 burials of different types investigated on the second necropolis. They are largely burial mounds with a stone box or graves. Large, richly decorated burial mounds are equipped with "altars", i.e. burial chambers with a set of vessel. A constant burial rite had been observed from the end of the 4th millennium to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC in the Plovdag second necropolis. Radical changes in the funeral rite occurred in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC following the appearance of the so-called tiled graves. In terms of their construction and finds, these graves were quite different from burial mounds.*

*In 2012, third necropolis discovered in Plovdag which dates back to the Early and Late Bronze Age. On the third necropolis, a grave with 16 "altars" with an illustration of the cult of ancestors among ancient tribes of Nakhichevan were excavated.*

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**ÖZET**

*Plovdağ arkeolojik kazılarına 1986 yılında başlanmıştır. Üç yıl süren çalışmalarda Plovdağ I Nekropolü'nde 32 adet kurgan ve Son Tunç Çağı yerleşiminin küçük bir kısmı kazılmıştır. Plovdağ'da arkeolojik kazılar yeniden 2004 yılında başlamış, bu çalışmalarda dağın kuzey yamacında 5 hektarlık bir alana yayılmış 2 numaralı nekropol - kurgan mezarlığı bulunmuştur. 2 numaralı nekropolün merkezi alanında Geç ve Orta Tunç Çağ kurganlarının altında Erken Tunç Çağ yerleşimi ortaya çıkarılmıştır.*

*Plovdağ II Nekropolü'nde günümüze kadar 93 adet mezar incelenmiştir. Bu mezarların çoğu taş sanduka veya toprak mezarlı kurganlardır. Büyük kurganların içinde çanak çömlekler bulunan "sunaklar" vardır.*

*Araştırmalar sonucunda, Plovdağ II Nekropolü'nde MÖ IV. Binyılın sonlarından MÖ II. Binyılın ortalarına kadar süregelen sabit bir gömü geleneğinin varlığı anlaşılmıştır. MÖ II. Binyılın ortalarından sonra sal taşlı mezarların yaygınlaşması ile gömü geleneğinde keskin değişimler meydana gelir. Sal taşlı mezarlar hem inşa teknikleri, hem de malzemelerine göre kurganlardan keskin şekilde ayrılırlar.*

*2012 yılında Plovdağ'da yeni ortaya çıkarılmış Erken ve Son Tunç Çağlarına ait III numaralı nekropolün kazılarına başlanmıştır. Bu nekropolde 16 adet "sunaklı" bir kurgan açığa çıkarılmıştır. Bu gelenek Nahçıvan bölgesinde yaşayan eski kabileler arasında "atalar kültürünün" varlığını gösterir. Plovdağ nekropollerinin arkeolojik olarak araştırılması Tunç Çağı'nda (MÖ IV-II. Binler) Nahçıvan'ın kabilelerinin ölü gömme gelenekleri ve inançları hakkında detaylı bilgiler elde etmeye olanak sağlamaktadır.*



Figure 1: Plovdag Necropolis II / *Plovdağ II. Nekropol.*

## INTRODUCTION

The history of examination of the burial sites of Nakhichevan goes back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was continued in the 1920s by famous archeologists I. Meshaninov<sup>1</sup> and A. Miller<sup>2</sup> on necropolis of Kyzylburun. In the territory of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, the earliest burial sites dating back to the Late Eneolithic/Chalcolithic were discovered in ancient settlement Kultepe I by O. Abibullayev<sup>3</sup>. V. Aliyev<sup>4</sup> wrote about Middle Bronze Age burial traditions, whereas Late Bronze-Early Iron Age sites were examined by M. Seyidov<sup>5</sup>, V. Bakshaliyev<sup>6</sup>, S. Kashkay, B. Ibragimov<sup>7</sup> and G. Agayev<sup>8</sup>. Apart from monographs, there were hundreds of articles published; however, the funeral rite of Nakhichevan's ancient tribes still cannot be considered a comprehensively examined one.

In Nakhichevan's Eneolithic/Chalcolithic settlements, bodies were buried in the settlement, under the floor of dwellings, or between buildings, in oval or rectangular pits, in hocker position; they were first wrapped into a mat<sup>9</sup>. No single Eneolithic/Chalcolithic grave with ground constructions has been found in Nakhichevan. This funeral rite changed in the Early Bronze Age when graves were located outside the settlement. Extramural cemeteries were located at nearby settlements. Such choice of a locality

helped preserve the many graves and, at the same time, graves did not occupy farming lands that Nakhichevan was short of. In Early Bronze Age, graves were built like buildings. Changes in the architecture and construction techniques of dwellings and graves also had parallels.

## PLOVDAG'S NECROPOLISES

In the Early Bronze Age, every settlement had a burial ground with territory of which was long time larger than the area of the many settlements it belonged. One of such southern Caucasus site is Plovdag, an archaeological complex including three burial grounds and two settlements covering all the stages of the Bronze Age<sup>10</sup>. Apart from them, Plovdag contains remains of an ancient temple, a public building, and a natural "amphitheater" for ceremonies and gatherings.

Archaeological complex Plovdag is located in the territory of Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, at River Gilanchay, not far away from the river's confluence with the Araxes river. Plovdag stretches into a fertile river valley. It's soil consists of gray clay, stones-of pink, not too solid tuff. These volcanic rocks are gradually destroyed by rain and snow, get mixed with clay and form a firm, "cemented" layer above the graves. Thus, what is discovered in these naturally cemented chambers of burials is in a comparatively good condition.

The Plovdag I necropolis is located on the southern slope of a mountain, near the settlement. Thirty-two burial mounds were excavated mostly concentrated closer to the settlement<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Meshaninov 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Miller 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Abibullayev 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Aliyev 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Seyidov 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Bahşaliyev 1997; Bahşaliyev 2002

<sup>7</sup> Aslanov/Ibragimov/Kaşkay 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Agayev 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Abibullayev 1982: 39.

<sup>10</sup> Ibragimov 2007: 86-89.

<sup>11</sup> Ibragimov 2005: 154-163.

The Plovdag II necropolis is located on the northern slope of mountain and occupies an area of approx. 5 hectares (Fig. 1). Different parts of the necropolis contain burials of different types. The larger part of the necropolis's area is occupied by Middle and Late Bronze Age burial mounds. The Late Bronze Age burial mounds - preserved in a more or less good condition - are built with a cromlech of two-rows of large or middle-sized stones. The sizes of these burial mounds vary from 3 to 10 diam. The western part of necropolis revealed an Early Bronze Age cultural layer, under the burial mounds.

The Plovdag III necropolis is located approx. 100 m of the first one. Graves are also largely burial mounds<sup>12</sup>. Only the northern end of necropolis found "tiled" graves identical to number 10 grave of the second necropolis, in terms of construction and burials.

On the Plovdag necropolises, there have been found several types of burials with different constructions. While some of these changes resulted from social changes in the community, other, more substantial changes resulted from ethnic resettlement.

The Plovdag necropolises found mainly four types of burials: 1) Earthen graves found in the settlements, between/among houses; 2) Earthen grave covered with mound; 3) Stone boxes covered with mound; 4) Tiled graves with surrounding rectangular stone causeway.

To give a full understanding about a funeral rites at the Plovdag necropolises, we'd like to introduce a detailed description of one untouched grave of each type, by periods.

### **EARTHEN GRAVES OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 4<sup>TH</sup> MILLENNIUM BC**

The Plovdag's earliest burial was discovered in the central part of the second necropolis, 1.6 kilometers northeast of an Early Bronze Age settlement. There was found neither single evidence of its being a ground grave nor remains of an overlapping one. Like Late Eneolithic/Chalcolithic burials in Kültepe I settlement, this burial was located between houses. It is a rectangular, 1.7-m long, 0.9-m wide burial chamber. In the center of the chamber, there is the skeleton of a middle-aged man put on his left side, in a semi-hocker position, and with his head turned eastward (Fig. 2). The skeleton has been preserved well and is toothed. The right hand is raised over the face while the left hand stretches along the body. Together with the skeleton, the burial contains the head and part of a carcass of shorthorn cattle. The head and part of the

back of the cattle were put in front of the dead man's face, whereas the cattle's backbone and ribs are put behind the man's face. At the body's knees, there were found two black bowls of similar form but different size. The bowls were made by hand, roughly and asymmetrically. The clay contains an admixture of chopped straw. The baking quality is good. Similar vessels were found in settlement of Kültepe I, in the layer of Eneolithic/Chalcolithic, and date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC<sup>13</sup>.



Figure 2: Late Eneolithic/Chalcolithic Earthen Grave / *Son Kalkolitik Çağı'na Ait Basit Toprak Mezar.*

### **EARTHEN GRAVES COVERED WITH MOUNDS**

In the beginning of Early Bronze Age, burials begin displaying signs of an earthen grave, in the form of a single-row round cromlech. The finds of these graves are somewhat richer than that of the earlier burials. One untouched burial (number 8) of such type was discovered in the eastern end of the first necropolis. The cromlech has an approximate 9-diam size. The mound has soil mixed with stones. Seventy cm deep in the cromlech, there was found a 1.7-m long, 1.0-m wide rectangular burial pit. The burial chamber contains a male skeleton put on the left side, in a semi-hocker position, and with his head turned eastward (Fig. 3). The left hand is open, and the right hand is bent and raised upwards. The skull of shorthorn cattle is put in front of the man's forehead. The cattle's extremities are put into the burial's northwestern corner. East of the man's skull, there is a small jug, whereas the dead man's right hand holds a small semi-spherical cup. In front of the skeleton, on the level of breast, there have been found a bronze ring, a bone needle, and a bone awl. All these finds were located in a leather bag that is strictly traceable. It should be noted that the "cup in hand" rite was spread widely in Plovdag's earthen graves<sup>14</sup>. First

<sup>13</sup> Abibullayev 1982: 188, 290, Table X.

<sup>14</sup> Ibragimov/Kashkay 2005: 104-105; Ibragimov 2007: 36-43; Ibragimli 2011: 86-96.

<sup>12</sup> İbrahimov/Qadirzade/Xelilov 2013: 150-154.

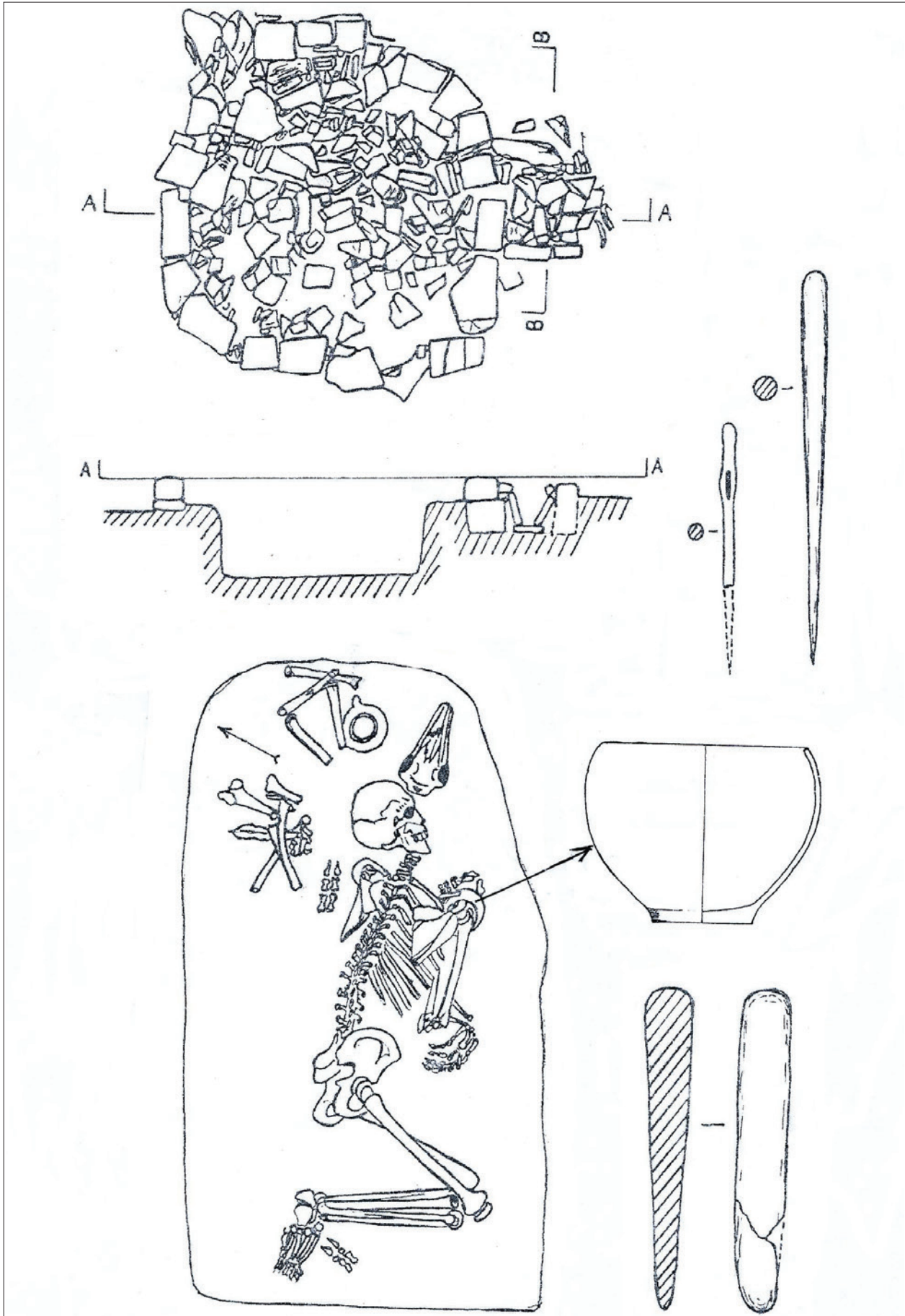


Figure 3: Early Bronze Age Earthen Grave, No. 8 / *Erken Tunç Çağı'na Ait 18 No'lu Basit Toprak Mezar:*

met at Kultepe I Eneolithic/Chalcolithic graves, this rite continues to exist till the Late Bronze Age.

The altar of burial mound number 8 is attached to the eastern side of cromlech. It is rectangular in plan made of stone (Fig. 3). It contained one black jug.

Earthen grave covered with mound of Middle Bronze Age number 22 contains, apart from other vessels, a single-handled low-tray painted vase (Fig. 4).

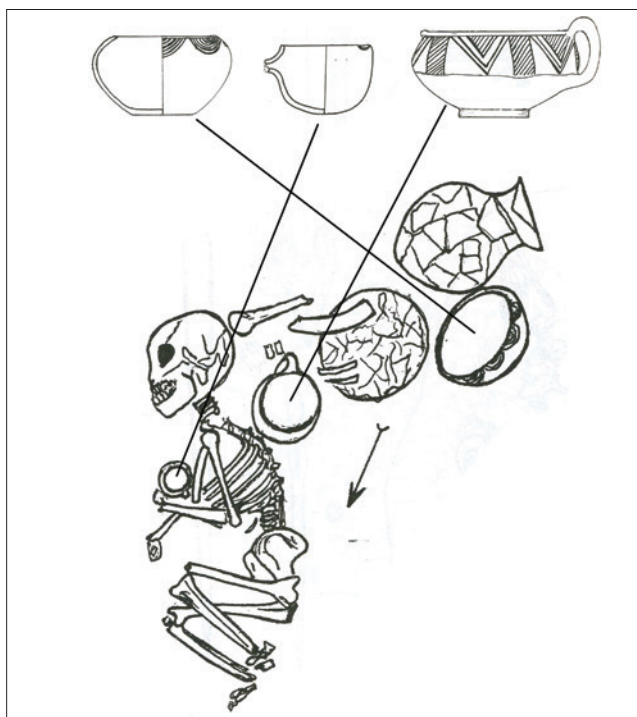


Figure 4: Middle Bronze Age Earthen Grave, No. 22 / *Orta Tunç Çağı'na Ait 22 No'lu Basit Toprak Mezar.*

Earthen grave covered with mound shows essential changes at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium-the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. One untouched burial of such sort was unearthed at the northern end of the central part of the second necropolis (burial mound number 33). This grave is located near and on the same level with burial mound number 25. The western sides of both burial mounds are located on the wall of an Early Bronze Age house.

The southern part of a round cromlech of burial mound number 33 has been preserved. Outer stones are not particularly different in terms of size; they all are tiled and form a single-row horizontal disc. At the depth of 1.3-1.4 m, in the center, there was a rectangular burial pit (with oval corners) stretching west-east direction. The chamber is 1.7 m long and 0.88-0.90 m wide. The burial chamber contains a male skeleton in a semi-hocker position (Fig. 5). A pebble is put next to the shoulders of skeleton, from the backside, to prevent it from falling on

the back. Earth is put under the head, to prevent it from falling and keep it horizontal. The right hand of man holds a miniature cup. The knees are a little bit separated, and the right leg is carefully put over the left one. At the left knee of body, there is a bowl with a crown slightly bent outside, a spherical body, and a straight bottom. A similar but a smaller second vessel is located at the back of body. Nothing but the bowls was found in the burial.

Some Middle Bronze Age burial mounds draw attention, primarily, by their construction. These burial mounds date back to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC covering a period from Early Bronze to Middle Bronze Age. One untouched burial of such sort was excavated in the eastern part of the second necropolis (number 67). It is earthen grave covered with mound; however, it has a specific construction that is different from that of the rest burial mounds of Plovdag. A group of such burial mounds is located in the eastern part of the necropolis and covers an area of approx. 400 square m.

The 3-diam cromlech of burial mound number 67 is round. The cromlech's all stones are round, about one m long and 30-50 cm wide. They are put as horizontal layers above an earthen grave. At the eastern side, one flat gravestone is put onto its rib as if imitating the grave's entryway. The depth from the cromlech to the skeleton is 1.0 m. The skeleton of a young man lies in a earthen chamber (122 cm long, 87 cm wide, and 45 cm deep) in a semi-hocker position, on the left side, and with his head turned eastward (Fig. 6). The body is well preserved. The head is turned backwards, the mouth is open, and the lower jaw is raised. There is a ring-shaped earring on the left ear. The left hand is stretched downwards, and the right hand is bent upwards. The left knee is a bit higher than the right one. In front of the face, near the right hand, there is a miniature cup; in front of the breast, there is a pink colored vessel with a bit embedded spherical body and flat bottom (Fig. 6). No other finds were found in the grave.

## STONE BOXES GRAVES COVERED WITH MOUNDS

The end of the Early Bronze Age appeared of large burial mounds with a composite-construction stone box covered with mound. One of well-preserved mounds of such sort is burial mound number 25. It is located north of burial mound number 33. The preserved hill of the 4.2-4.6-diam mound is 45-50 cm high. 1.1-m high cromlech is built of middle-sized stones. The burial chamber stretches west-east direction, located in the center of the cromlech, and is overlapped by large stones (Fig. 7). It is a rectangular grave made of comparatively large stones. The burial chamber is 1.68 m long and 0.8 m wide. Eastern side of the chamber built with large stones. One of them is put onto its side and

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Figure 5: Middle Bronze Age Grave, No. 33 / *Orta Tunç Çağı'na Ait 33 No'lu Basit Toprak Mezar.*



Figure 6: Middle Bronze Age Burial Mound, No. 67 / *Orta Tunç Çağı'na Ait 67 No'lu Kurgan.*

is located between the overlapping stone and the burial floor, so the entrance is narrowed by half. The entrance is closed by two stones. The upper stones of narrow side is located 26-28 cm above the overlapping level. In such a manner, a stone is emphasized in this burial, too. The burial chamber contains a skeleton of a middle-aged man put on his left side, in a semi-hoeker position, and with his head turned eastward. On the neck, there is necklace of cornelian and paste beads. There are two black vessels put in front of the skull. There is a dromos located between the burial chamber and the altar. The dromos is rectangular. The altar contains four vessels, including a black one and three pink one. The pink ones are equipped with a short beak. These vessels had been used, so the painted ornament of the vessels turned to be effaced before they were put into the graves; nevertheless, traces have remained. Burial mound number 25 is only grave containing vessels with a beak of the second necropolis (Fig. 7). In the opinion of some researchers, beaked vessels expanded to the territory of Nakhichevan from the Middle East.

The most illustrative, richest burial mounds of Plovdag are the Late Bronze Age graves. On the second necropolis, there were unearthed several untouched graves, one of which (number 18) is a tribal leader's grave. It appears from the accompanying burial goods that he at the same time was the priest of tribe.

Burial mound number 18 is located in the center of the second necropolis, near the top of Mt. Plovdag, 9-10 m lower than the ruins of a Late Bronze Age temple. The preserved burial mound embankment consisting of several layers is 90 cm high. The upper layer of mound is 15 to 20 cm thick; the second, crushed stone layer is 20 to 25 cm thick; and the third, 45 to 50 cm thick layer consists of middle-sized stones. The stones of latter are put in the form of a hillock located straight above the burial chamber. Similar stones are put downhill along the perim toward the overlapping stones. On the overlapping ones, there is another layer of carefully put flat stones ending in a semicircle at the western side and on the same line with the overlapping stones at the eastern side. It is interesting that the large stones of the overlapping ones end in a semicircle at the western side, too. The sense of such composition of the burial mound embankment is not clear; it might have a function of safeguarding graves against landslides.

It is noteworthy that 20-30 cm of the overlapping stones, there is one long stone that raises 23 to 25 cm above it. Such stones were found in all large burial mounds. They are always at the entrance of burial chamber, i.e. where the head of a body is turned to. It should be noted that stones of modern graves are located in absolutely the same position.





Figure 7: Early Bronze Sub-Mound Stone Box, No. 25 / Erken Tunç Çağı'na Ait 25 No'lu Taş Sanduka Mezar.

The burial chamber above has a dromos from its eastern side; the floor of the dromos is at the floor level. The walls of the dromos are built of large single-row stones. Following the burial of the body, the dromos was filled in with clay-mortared flat stones.

The burial chamber is overlapped by three thick tiles. Three walls, except for the eastern one, are built with large stones. The eastern wall - entrance- is built with one large tile. The chamber is filled in with earth that had been penetrating it for centuries because of rainwater. This is a rectangular, 150-cm long chamber; the width of its eastern wall and western wall is 70 cm and 96 cm respectively; the height chamber is 80 cm.

The skeleton of a 30-35-year old man is in the center of chamber grave. The skeleton is put in a semi-hocker position, with his back next to the northern wall (Fig. 8). No headwear was found on him. Near the left ear and pressed towards the earth by the skull, there were in-situ earrings of thirty-two small paste beads and one shell.

Two necklaces of cornelian, paste beads and organic-material beads that became carbonized as time went were found on the neck of body. Each necklace has one amulet. One of the amulets, made of a light gray stone, is disk-shaped, convex in the middle, and is larger than the rest of the beads. The convex part has a round hole and on both sides is decorated by channeled ornament. The second amulet - an elongated hexagon - is made of silver. Traces of a simple knitted collar were detected at the back of the skull.

In front of the face of body, there was a 30-cm dagger, with its haft turned toward the entrance. South of the dagger, there was a red engobed vessel. Near it, at the southern wall, there was the second, black vessel with a "mushroom-like" ear. At the bottom of vessel down the baked part, a 1-cm hole was drilled. It should be noted that the black vessel with a "mushroom-like" ear is still the only find of its sort in the composition of finds of the Plovdag burials.

The skeleton of a wild goat, with its skull located under the black vessel and its forelegs located under the red vessel in the southeastern corner. In the goat's breast, closer to the right leg, there was found an obsidian arrowhead.

A quiver with ten obsidian and flint arrowheads was found northeast of the vessel. The quiver is 60 cm long, 13 cm wide, and 6-7 cm thick. The quiver is made of a thin tree layer coated with leather. Thin, 0.8-cm wide bronze belts were found fastened to the lower and upper sides of quiver. Thin convex bronze buttons (1-cm round, 1-millim

thick) were fastened to between the belts in three rows. At the bottom of quiver found black elastic substances. The remaining traces made it possible to identify the length (60 cm) and the thickness (0.7-1.0 cm) of the arrows.

The right hand of body was empty, while the left hand held a bronze mace with four knobs. The hole of mace is rectangular on the upper side and round on the southern side. A black elastic substance existed of the hole. Near the mace, there were traces of wings of a bird and small paste beads. A bronze bracelet was found at the feet of skeleton.

It appears from the description that all the finds are located on the southern side of burial chamber, in front of the body, while the body is located on the northern side of burial chamber. This rule is observed strictly in all stone boxes. The altar of burial mound number 18 is attached to the eastern side of mound (Fig. 9).

## **TILED GRAVES WITH SURROUNDING RECTANGULAR STONE CAUSEWAYS**

The beginning of the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC with the appearance of new funeral rites as the community endured great changes. By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, there appeared quite new types of burials that were different from previous ones from the point of either construction of grave or implements. These graves with a surrounding rectangular stone causeway yield only monochrome pink and painted ceramics. In the Early Iron Age, these burials replaced burial mounds everywhere, which are confirmed by materials obtained from several necropolises. Graves with a surrounding rectangular stone causeway were discovered on the northern ends of the second and third necropolises which were subsequently examined. They all were built in compliance with a strictly developed plan. The ground part of the previously robbed grave number 10 was well preserved, which is located on the very north end of the central part of the second necropolis (Fig. 10) The chamber was robbed and unearthed several times. In the center of the rectangular (3.5 m/3.2 m) stone causeway, the burial chamber is located (1.53 m/0.8 m) built of large stones put onto the rib. The burial chamber is 0.8 m deep. Probably, after a platform was made a burial earthen, there was first built the northern wall of one large stone, and then a second stone, which is properly the eastern wall of grave, was vertically attached to the eastern edge of first stone. In the same manner, the second stone was attached by the third stone, which constitutes to the southern wall. The western edges of the northern and southern stones are located in line. The western wall - the entrance of grave - is also built of a single stone. Tiles of a smaller size

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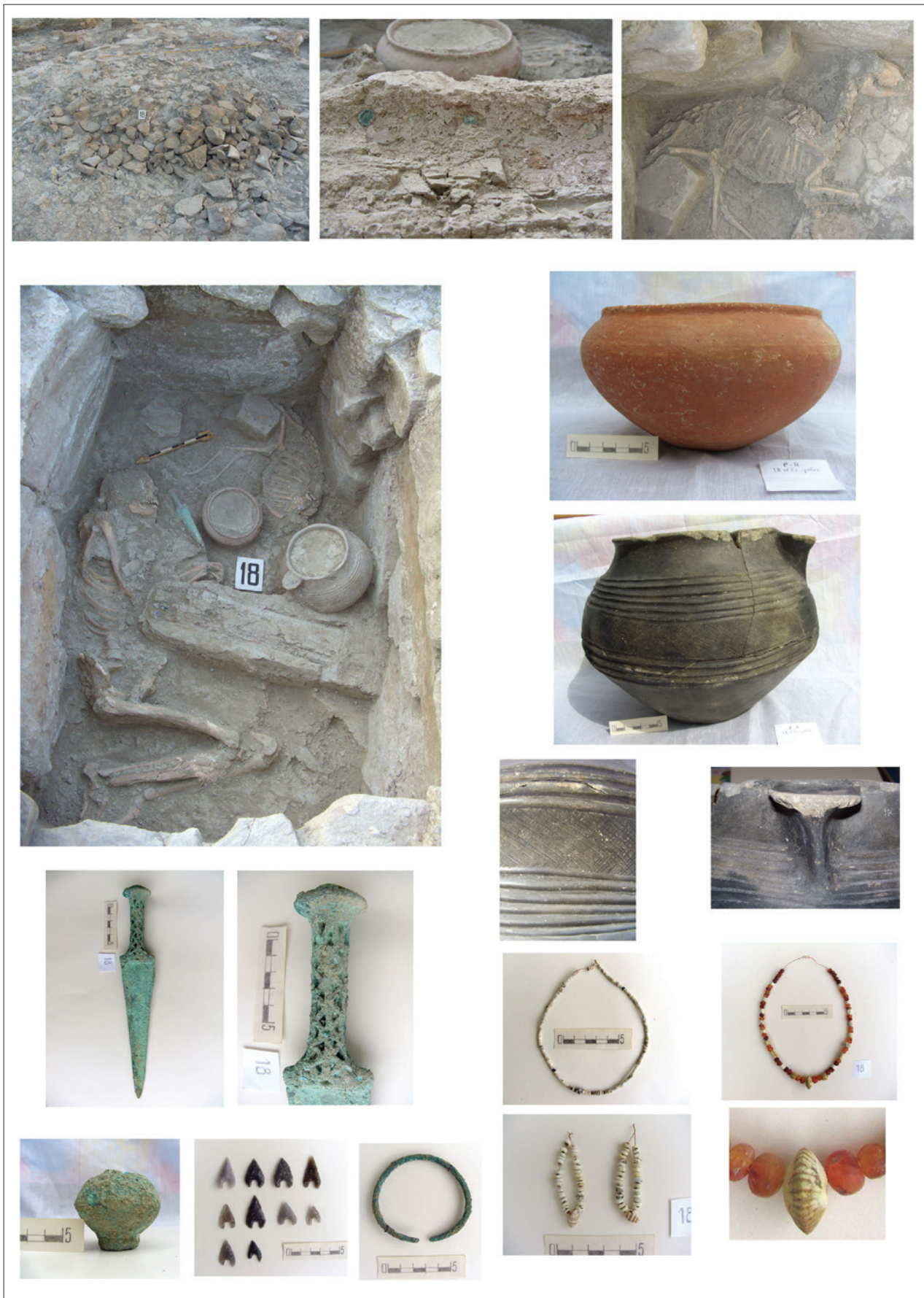


Figure 8: Late Bronze Stone Box With Sub-Mound, No.18 / *Son Tunç Çağı'na Ait 18 No'lu Taş Sanduka Mezar.*



Figure 9: Altar of Burial Mound, No.18 / 18 No'lu Kurganın Altarı (Kurbangahı).



Figure 10: Tiled Grave No. 10 / 10 No'lu Sal Taşlı Mezar:

were used to the edges of chamber. Then, the chamber was covered by specially selected thick stones. These graves were also equipped with a dromos carefully filled in with stone slabs put on the rib like a stone that blocks the entrance. Around the grave, the stones are put on their flat faces. The remains of two skeletons on their left side, in a hocker position, and with heads turned southward found in the southeastern part of grave. Here, also two painted vessels with pink clay were found.

No single untouched grave of this type has so far been found. Nevertheless, the robbed, ruined graves bring out rather interesting materials, the content of which is quite different from that of burial mounds. Cylindrical seals were found only in these graves (Fig. 11). In addition, anthropomorphic bone beads are typical for these graves. The multiple burial rites are also linked to tiled graves. Finally, these graves later became the main type of Early Iron Age necropolises.

Early burial mounds at Plovdag are concentrated closer to the settlement but stand separately. They are small, round burial mounds with an embankment. The mounds that are no larger than 3-diam have the preserved height of up to 1.5-1.7 m. Stones of the cromlech at the floor of mound are large, some of them are up to 1.0-1.2 m high. The

skeletons in hocker position, on the right or left side, and with heads turned eastward found in these early burials. The goods of these graves were poor: mostly two or three gray or black vessels. It appears from the materials found in the early burial mounds of Plovdag that the owners of these graves did not live a rich life as no considerable stratification had yet occurred in the community. Their primary occupations were cattle-raising and agriculture and gathering which they still practiced.



Figure 11: Cylindrical Seals From Tiled Graves / Sal Taşlı Mezarlardan Silindir Mühürler.

Pink, black-glazed and gray pottery is typical for the Plovdag archaeological sites. Comparative analysis of pottery of graves of different types makes it possible to trace its evolution and innovations in the techniques of making and artistic application.

As mentioned above, large Plovdag burial mounds had so-called “altars”, i.e. funeral chambers<sup>15</sup>. The “altars” of the early burial mounds at Plovdag are small (0.3 m/0.4 m) and made of stones. The floor and the overlapping of these altars are also built of stone. Early altars revealed nothing but two or three vessels<sup>16</sup>.

From the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium-the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, the sizes of altars and the number of their finds started changing considerably. At this time, large sub-mound graves with comparatively rich finds appeared. The altars of these burial mounds were also large and contained vessels of different categories and some bones of shorthorn cattle and birds, and sometimes various kinds of beads. The appearance of the altars resembles miniature burial mounds. The walls of their chambers were built of different stones. As a rule, the altars are attached to the cromlechs, so the attached part of the cromlech is simultaneously the western wall of altar. The altars had mostly rectangular chambers; however, there were also pentagonal altars.

In some altars, for instance, altar number 17, the chamber is larger than the chamber graves. Hence, the number of finds, particularly, pottery of these altars is more than those of the some graves.

The location of vessels in the chambers of altars has a fixed group that is observed in almost every altar dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. In the southwestern corner of rectangular chambers of all large altars, there is a pink jug with a flat bottom, spherical body and a flat ribbon crown fastened straight to the body. A similar vessel (number 76) was found in Chalipiragorebi. Scholars date it back to approx. the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>17</sup>.

Graves resembling the Plovdag burial mounds, from the point of composition and finds, were also examined at the cemetery of Namgalamitsa on the Digom Plain<sup>18</sup>, at the cemetery of Lori-Berd

have burial mounds with an altar (an extra grave, or a funeral chamber). They are identical from the point of not only composition but also chronology. Identical burial mounds of Plovdag, Chalipiragorebi, Namgalamitsa, and Lori-Berd are dated back to the 25<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.

The altars were not built simultaneously with the burial mounds. More likely, they were built on the anniversary day of a deceased body. During funeral ceremonies, an altar was being built at the home of the deceased (necropolis) where they put earthenware full of meals, so a funeral ceremony was ending near the burial mound of deceased. On the third necropolis, near burial mound number 3, 16 altars were discovered (Fig. 12). Probably, in the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, the cult of ancestors became very prominent, so the funeral ceremonies were performed pompously, in a prolonged manner.

It appears that some funeral feasts, rituals and other funeral ceremonies at Plovdag were conducted, probably, in the area of the many burial. This is proved by special floored platforms, large earthen cauldrons and bones of animals found throughout the area of the burial. It seems that funeral feasts accompanied by a special rite was performed on the

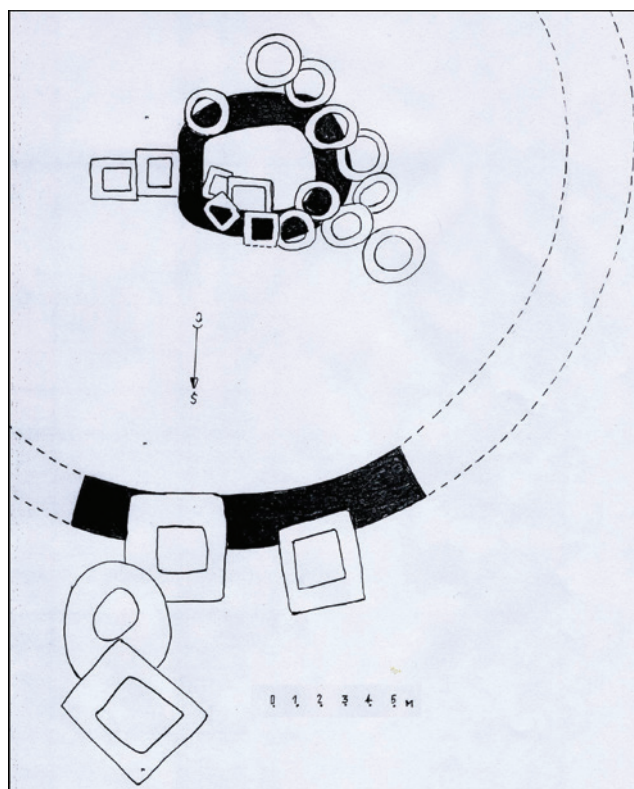


Figure 12: Late Bronze Graves with 16 Altar, No. 3 / *Son Tunç Çağı'na Ait 16 Altarlı (Kurbangahlı) 3 No'lu Mezar.*

<sup>15</sup> Ibragimov/Kashkay 2005: 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> Ibragimov/Kashkay 2005: 104-105.

<sup>17</sup> Abramishvili/Abramişvili/Başakidze/Pxaladze/Qiquaşvili/Daşaşvili/Sultanişvili/Turiaşvili 1995: 57-58.

<sup>18</sup> Abramishvili/Abramişvili/Başakidze/Pxaladze/Qiquaşvili/

Daşaşvili/Sultanişvili/Turiaşvili 1995: 60-62.

day of the first anniversary of a body, during which the “altars” were built.

A common funeral rite, with insignificant differences, survived yet to the early part of the Late Bronze Age. It goes without saying that all burial mounds (earthen graves with mounds and stone boxes with mounds) of Plovdag should be referred, regardless from the period of their existence, to a common burial rite that had existed till the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. This is confirmed by the orientation and location of the dead body, the types of mounds, and the presence of altars of both types. They are different from the point of finds, especially, pottery. Stone boxes with sub-mounds have quality black-glazed and red-glazed pink pottery. In turn, in earthen graves with sub-mounds, 90% of the pottery consists of gray or black pottery finds without ornaments.

Chronologically, the Plovdag graves are distributed as follows: earthen graves identical to the burials of Kültepe I exist till the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC; mostly earthen graves with sub-mounds are typical for a period till the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium-the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC; and stone boxes with sub-mounds built of flat stones and overlapped by comparatively large stones start appearing from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. The latter burials were spread widely in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC; starting from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC radical changes began in the funeral rite. First, burial mounds start disappearing gradually. Second, the orientation of a body in a burial chamber starts changing. Third, no common orientation is observed under the construction of altars. The latter are attached to graves from either north or south or west. Fourth, new types of burials with surrounding stone decking begins to appear. Fifth, the walls of graves consist of separate stones put onto rib and are overlapped by the same stone slabs.

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC when burial mounds, more exactly, an embankment above graves begins to disappear, stones are put very carefully around a burial, while the circular form of cromlechs still remains. However, by the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, only the rectangular form of a cromlech starts being applied while building a grave. The rectangular flat-stone decking around a burial chamber, a form that emerged at Plovdag at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, was spread widely on necropolises Munjuklutepe and Khaly-Keshan dating back to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC<sup>19</sup>.

Comparatively rich burial goods were found in burials and in altar chambers dating back to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The vessels contain high-quality glasses, vases, and other new types, while decorations include white cylindrical beads with a carved geometrical ornament. Besides, anthropomorphic beads depicting a stylized human face found in these burials.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the archaeological investigations of the Plovdag necropolises revealed new data concerning the funeral rite of ancient tribes of the Bronze Age Nakhichevan. First, a steady funeral rite had existed in Plovdag throughout the Bronze Age. Bodies were in a hocker position (men on the left side and women on the right side), and with heads turned eastward. Second, the rite of “altars” that had been spread widely from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Third, stone boxes above the entrance of grave had a specially embedded with stone. Fourth, in earthen graves, the hand of a dead man held a vessel. This rite had existed at Plovdag from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Fifth, all infant stone boxes and earthen graves have one vessel.

<sup>19</sup> Aslanov/Ibragimov/Kaşkay 2002: 7-40.

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