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CUPRINS – СОДЕРЖАНИЕ – CONTENTS

STUDII – ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ – RESEARCHES

MATERIALE ŞI CERCETĂRI DE TEREN – МАТЕРИАЛЫ И ПОЛЕВЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ – PAPERS AND SURVEYS

DISCUŢII – ДИСКУССИИ – DISCUSSIONS

CERCETĂRI INTERDISCIPLINARE – МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ – INTERDISCIPLINARY SURVEYS

RECENZII ŞI PREZENTĂRI DE CARTE – РЕЦЕНЗИИ И КНИЖНОЕ ОБОЗРЕНИЕ – PAPER AND BOOK REVIEW

IN MEMOREM

STUDII – ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ – RESEARCHES

Najaf Museibli

Chagritepe Neolithic settlement

Key words: Azerbaijan, Neolithic, settlement, constructions, stone tools, obsidian, flint, bone products.
Cuvinte cheie: Azerbaidjan, neolitic, așezare, construcții, unelte de piatră, obsidian, silex, piese din os.

Najaf Museibli
Chagritepe Neolithic settlement

The problem of the emergence of early production traditions in the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, located on the periphery of the ancient Near Eastern cultures, is one of the main research areas of archaeologists. Excavations of monuments related to agricultural cultures of the Neolithic period in the territory of Azerbaijan began as early as the 1950s. In the western region of Azerbaijan, in the middle basin of the Kura River, archaeological excavations have been carried out at about 15 Neolithic settlements to date. All these monuments, taking into account common features, were united under the name of the Shomutepe culture, named after the first extensively excavated settlement in Agstafa district in the 1960s. The Chagritepe settlement presented in this article also belongs to this culture. The constructions discovered at the monument during excavations have a circular, rarely oval plan. The labor tools were made of various types of stone, obsidian, flint, and bone. These include grinderss, sickle teeth, curry-combs, bone punchers, and other tools. People who led a sedentary life in Chagritepe were engaged in cattle-breeding. A grave was discovered at the settlement during the excavation.

Najaf Museibli
Așezarea neolitică de la Chagritepe

Problema apariției tradițiilor de producție timpurii în Caucazul de Sud, inclusiv în Azerbaidjan, situat la periferia culturilor antice din Orientul Apropiat, este unul dintre principalele domenii de cercetare ale arheologilor. Săpăturile arheologice ale monumentelor legate de culturile de agricultori din perioada neolitică pe teritoriul Azerbaidjanului au început încă din anii 1950. Până în prezent, în regiunea vestică a Azerbaidjanului, în bazinul mijlociu al râului Kura, au fost efectuate săpături arheologice în 15 așezări neolitice. Toate aceste situri, ținând cont de caracteristicile comune, au fost incluse în cultura Shomutepe, numită după prima așezare excavată extensiv în districtul Agstafa în anii 1960. Așezarea Chagritepe, care face subiectul acestui studiu, aparține de asemenea, acestei culturi. Construcțiile descoperite în timpul săpăturilor au un plan circular, rareori oval. Uneltele de muncă erau lucrate din diferite tipuri de piatră, obsidian, silex și os. Acestea includ râșnițe, segmente de seceră, piepteni, perforatoare de os și alte unelte. Oamenii care duceau o viață sedentară în Chagritepe se ocupau cu creșterea vitelor. În timpul săpăturilor, în așezare a fost descoperit un mormânt.

Introduction

Currently, the investigation the history of the emergence of the early production economy in Azerbaijan is one of the main directions of archaeology. The main goal of the investigations is to study the origin of the production Neolithic in this region, its stages of development, and the problems of its transition to the subsequent Chalcolithic period. More intensive excavations are being carried out in the western region of Azerbaijan, in the Middle Kura basin (fig. 1). Here, Neolithic monuments of early agricultural and pastoral farming have been preserved to this day, as a rule, in the form of hills. One of such monuments, the Chagritepe settlement, is located east of the Khatai village of the Agstafa district at an altitude of 323 m above sea level [Museibli 2024].

The total area of the settlement is 110×80 m. The height of the hill is more than 3 m above the present surface. Since 2020, archaeological excavations have been carried out on an area of 200 square meters (253 square meters including stratigraphic walls between squares measuring 5×5 m). Since the excavation area was selected on the hang of the hill it is sloping towards the eastern foot of the hill. Accordingly, the cultural layer was thicker (3.7-3.8 m) in squares 1A and 1B, which were determined towards the center of the hill,

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Fig. 1. Location of monuments. 1 – Chagritepe; 2 – Shomutepe; 3 – Hasansu; 4 – Damjili; 5 – Gobustan.

and relatively less (1.7 m) in squares 4A and 4B at the foot of the hill. Archaeological excavations at the monument were completed in the summer of 2024. As a result of the excavation, it was determined that the maximum thickness of the cultural layer at the monument was 3.8 m.

The technical and typological characteristics of archaeological materials, especially obsidian and flint tools, allow us to date the Chagritepe settlement to the end of the 7th millennium BC – the beginning of the 6th millennium BC. The results of radiocarbon analyses conducted on samples from the monument also confirm this chronology[1] (*see* Table 1).

The results of the excavation and discussion

Construction remains

During excavations at Chagritepe settlement of the Shomutepe archaeological culture, construction remains covering 5 construction horizons or layers were revealed. From the modern surface downwards, construction layers I-IV were built with bricks, and in rare cases made from a mixture of clay, chopped straw, small stones, sand and other materials. All discovered structures are circular, and in rare cases oval in plan (fig. 2,1). They were built of a single layer of mud bricks. In rare cases, the structure remains were preserved at a height of 60-70 cm, sometimes 1 m (mainly in the upper layers), while the remaining structures were preserved at a height of 20-40 cm. The dimensions of the bricks used in the construction were 46×15×8/9 cm; 40×18×6 cm; 45×20×6 cm; 38×18×5 cm; 48×18×8 cm, and in other close dimensions. However, there were also exceptions. Thus, building No. 12, discovered at a depth of 1.6 m in square 1A, belonging to the II construction layer, was built with bricks measuring 24×20×5 cm and 20×18×5 cm. The bricks are usually weakly curved. This is due to the circular plan of the buildings. Some household wells were also built with mud bricks.

The number of brick-built construction remains discovered in the settlement is 38. Storage wells were built directly adjacent to the dwelling houses. Food supplies were stored in these wells. Stone and bone tools, including bones of various animals, were discovered inside these wells. At the same time, hearths were also discovered inside the

1. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Yoshihiro Nishiaki for his assistance in conducting these analyses.

Radiocarbon dates for Chagritepe, Azerbaijan						
Sample	Lab code	Conventional date BP	Calibrated BC (1SD)	Calibrated BC (2SD)	Material	δ13C
Chagritepe 1	TKA-30261	7058 ± 27 BP	5987-5968 BC (18.2%); 5954-5901 BC(50.1%)	6009-5886 BC (93.8%); 5857-5850 BC (1.6%)	Charcoal	-26.2 ± 0.2 ‰
Chagritepe 2	TKA-30262	6952 ± 27 BP	5884-5860 BC (17.2%); 5860-5849 BC (51.1%)	5964 BC (1.3%); 5956-5897 BC (94.1%)	Charcoal	-27.4 ± 0.2 ‰

Table 1. The analysis of radiocarbon resultas was made in OxCal 4.4/IntCal 20 (http://c14.qrch.ox.ac.uk/).

dwellings. As a rule, the inside of the hearths was filled with river stones. This served to keep the heat inside the hearth for a long time. The houses were heated by such hearths. The diameter of the largest dwellings was 4 m (No. 13) and more (No. 30). Two or more houses and auxiliary buildings adjacent to each other apparently belonged to a large family. The remains of building No. 10 belonging to horizon II at the junction of squares 3A and 3B are also large in size. This building was completely cleaned and its diameter was determined to be 3.8 m. The building has a 60 cm wide entrance door on the south side.

Building No. 38 belonging to horizon IV in the northeastern corner of square 1B, at a depth of 2.6 m, directly built above the remains of a semi basement pit, was preserved, measuring 25-26 cm wide and 25-30 cm high. The preserved lower part of this building remains was built entirely from a mixture of clay, chopped straw, small stones, sand and other materials.

Circular houses and farm buildings built of bricks and, in rare cases, mud is typical for the Shomutepe culture. Remains of such constructions have been discovered in the Shomutepe, Toyratepe, Qargalartepe, Hasansu, and other settlements excavated in this region. The walls of circular houses narrow upwards. This indicates that the roof of the houses was completed in the form of a dome. However, in rare cases, houses with cylindrical walls have also been discovered. Apparently, the roof of such houses was closed in a different way [Narimanov 1987, 14-25; Museibli 2023, 133-134].

The lowest V layer consisted of semi basements. This layer was best traced in squares 1A and 1B. The semi basement covered the main part of square 1A and the southern part of square 1B. However, its general shape could not be determined. The depth of the half-digging was 1-1.1 m. In square 1A, 6 pole sites close to each other were discovered in the north-western part, inside the semi basement, at a depth of 3 m. Their depth varies between 17-29 cm, and their diameters vary between 13-16 cm. Moreover, 2 pole sites were discovered near the western wall of square 2A, at a depth of 2.5 m, at a distance of 60 cm from each other. The sides of one of them was once reinforced with river stones to make the pole stand firmly, and fragments of grinderss were arranged at the bottom, that is, under the pole. The dimensions of both pole sites are similar: diameter – 10 cm, depth – 25 cm.

Another semi basement was discovered in square 3B at a depth of 2.4 m (fig. 2,1). In fact, it is somewhat difficult to determine the purpose of the remains of this building, which covers the northeastern part of the excavation square. Thus, the 40 cm wide walls of this rectangular construction, with its open side facing northeast, were made of soft, light-colored soil. The length of the main wall was 3.7 m, and the preserved depth of the semi basement was 50 cm. Short lines were drawn on the inner side of the northern and western walls in different directions on wet clay.

As in other Neolithic monuments of the region, houses in Chagritepe were built very close to each other, densely. The successive replacement of the construction layers proves that life continued uninterruptedly in the settlement. When a certain part of the houses collapsed or was damaged, they

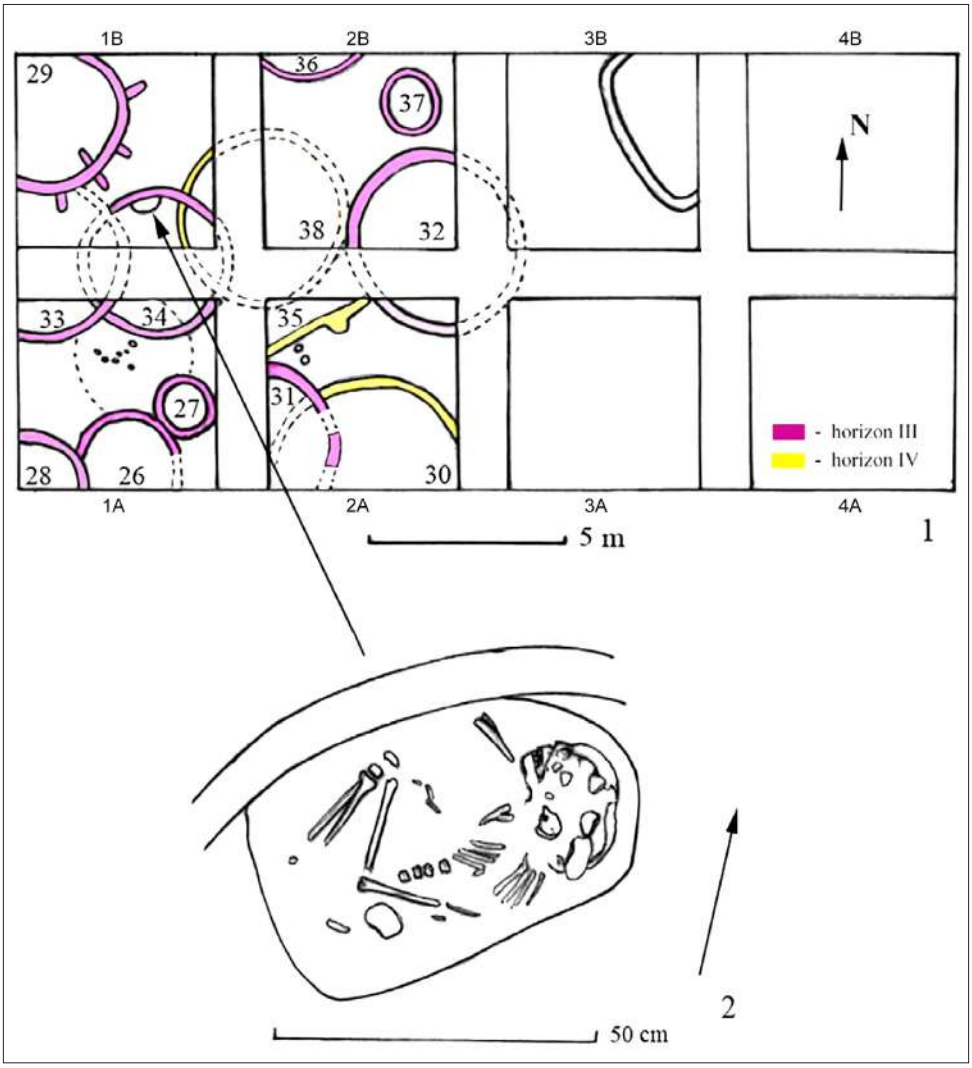

Fig. 2. Chagritepe excavation site. 1 – Remains of buildings of horizons III and IV; 2 – A child's grave.

were repaired, and when they became completely unusable, a new house was built over it, slightly moving it to the side. Thus, a thick cultural layer was formed. Such construction traditions, that is, the custom of building a new house over it a collapsed house or directly next to it, was characteristic of the early agricultural and pastoral cultures of the South Caucasus and the Middle East as a whole.

Temple and ritual finds

Excavations conducted in the summer seasons of five years in Chagritepe have also provided a lot of information about the spiritual culture and religious beliefs of the Neolithic inhabitants of the region. In this regard, the most interesting findings were discovered in square 1B of the excavation area. Here, at a depth of 1.8 m, the remains of building No. 11 with an oval plan belonging to the II layer were built over building No. 29 with a circular plan belonging to the III layer, the remains of which were discovered at a depth of 2.1-2.5 m. The structure of both constructions, which we consider to be places of worship, differs from the other buildings in the excavation area. Only a part of each of these buildings fell into the excavation area. Building No. 11, discovered in 2022 and with a length of more than 4 m, is oval in plan. However, the few other oval buildings are small in size.

Building No. 29, discovered in 2024, has a circular plan (fig. 2,1). This building was built at a depth of 2.6 m and was preserved at a height of 40-50 cm. Its lower part, 40 cm high, was built

with a pise. 4 projections 40-60 cm long, made of bricks, were added to the wall of this building to the south and east. One such projection was added to the building from the inside. The general plan of the building resembles the image of the Sun or a star. At the bottom of the eastern wall of both buildings (No. 11 and No. 29) there was a hearth – an area where a continuous fire was lit. Ritual finds were discovered inside the hearth – two anthropomorphic figures made of stone and one made of bone (fig. 3,1; fig. 6,1).

Information about one of the stone figures has already been published [Museibli 2024]. Such stone idols are found for the first time in the Shomutepe culture. These figures were placed there during certain religious ceremonies. The upper part of one of the figures is slightly smoothed. A channel-like strip was made in the middle part by the transverse rubbing-caving method. Due to the long stay in the fire, the entire surface of the stone is covered with a thick layer of soot (fig. 3,1). An anthropomorphic stone figure is known from the Mesolithic "Kaniza" camp of Gobustan (fig. 3,2) [Rustamov 1986, fig. 3] and from the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition layer of the Damjili cave [Nishiaki *et all.* 2025, fig. 2] (fig. 3,3). The main feature that brings all the figures together is the presence of a channel-like strip in the middle part of all of them. Most likely, this strip is an expression of a belt that was tied to the waist.

These anthropomorphic idols, and similar findings from other contemporary monuments in the region, indicate that abstract thinking about the human factor was predominant in the religious beliefs of the Neolithic Shomutepe culture people.

A zoomorphic figure was also found in Chagritepe. A zoomorphic figure made of easily crumbling brown stone was discovered in square 2B at a depth of 3 m. The elongated nose of this figure, which represents the head of a large horned animal, was smoothed and the end and mouth was flattened. The places indicating the horns are broken (fig. 3,4). A bull figure's head made of clay was discovered at the Neolithic settlement of Chalagan tepe in Karabakh. Its surface is decorated with paint [Narimanov, Azimov 1985, 10-11]. Although the Chalagan tepe figure is similar in general configuration to the Chagritepe figure, it is distinguished by its more realistic style.

Grave

During the excavations at Chagritepe, only one grave from the Neolithic period was discovered (fig. 2,2). This grave was discovered in square 1B, at a depth of 2.2 m at the base of the northern wall of building No. 34 belonging to the III construction layer. The length of the grave chamber, oriented northeast-southeast, was 60 cm, width 40 cm, and depth 20 cm. The perimeter of the chamber was reinforced with light-colored clay mixed soil, and the interior was filled with black ash-mixed soil. In this grave, a child of about 10-12 years old was buried on the right side, tightly curled up, with his head facing northeast. No additional materials were placed in the grave.

In general, the custom of burying the dead directly in the dwellings was widespread in the Neolithic period. However, graves were rarely

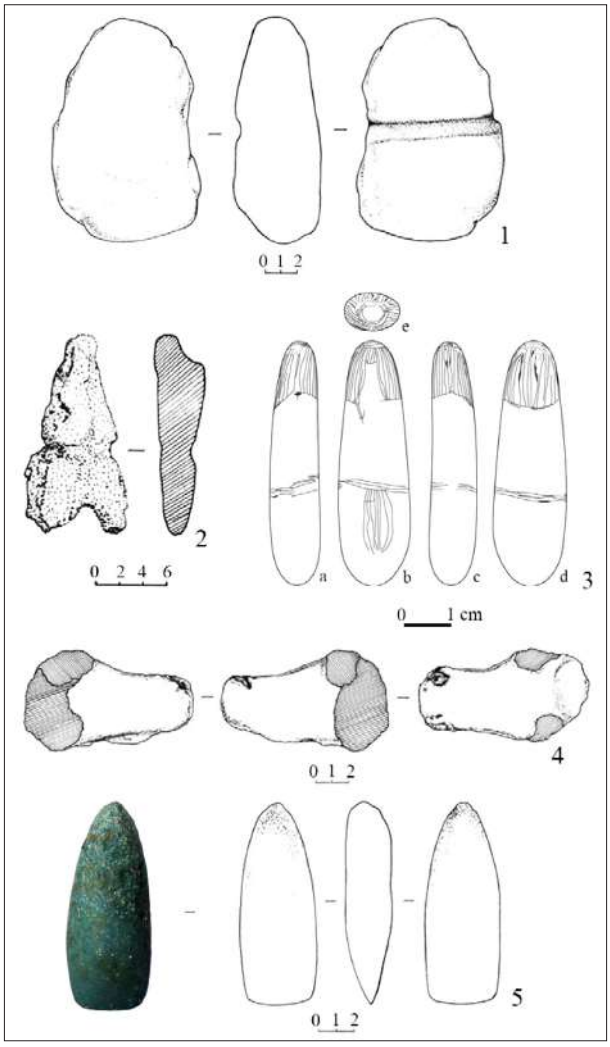

Fig. 3. 1-4 – Stone figures; 5 – Stone axe.

found in the Neolithic monuments of this region. Two graves belonging to the Neolithic period were studied at the Babadervish I settlement in Gazakh district [İsmayılov, Əliyev 1972, 39-40]. At the Menteshtepe settlement in Tovuz district, wells were discovered in which a large number of people were buried [The Kura Project 2017, 163-175]. It is not known where and under what conditions burials were carried out in other monuments of this period in the region. This is one of the main directions of future research on monuments belonging to the Neolithic period.

Animal bones

Numerous osteological remains were discovered in the excavation area of Chagritepe. Such finds were very rare up to a depth of 1.7-2 m. In the lower layers, especially in the storage wells, animal bones were discovered in large quantities. More than 90% of the bones belong to neat and small cattle. Along with these, bones of pigs, roe deer and other game animals were also discovered. A whole fox skeleton was discovered at a depth of 1.8 m at the bottom of the eastern wall of square 3B. Only some leg bones have slightly changed their position. It was lying on its right side. The discovery of a whole skeleton of a wild animal is a rare event for the Neolithic monuments of the region. It is also possible that the fox was ritually buried here.

Stone product

Big tools typical of agriculture, such as upper and lower grain stones, grinders, etc., were found at Chagritepe, made of various types of stone. Among the interesting materials, small axe-type or wedge-shaped tools made of stone can be noted (fig. 3,5). It is not exception that these tools were of a ceremonial nature.

The vast majority of tools are made of obsidian (fig. 4, 1-2,4-5,7-8). Nuclei and tools from obsidian with various functions have been dis-

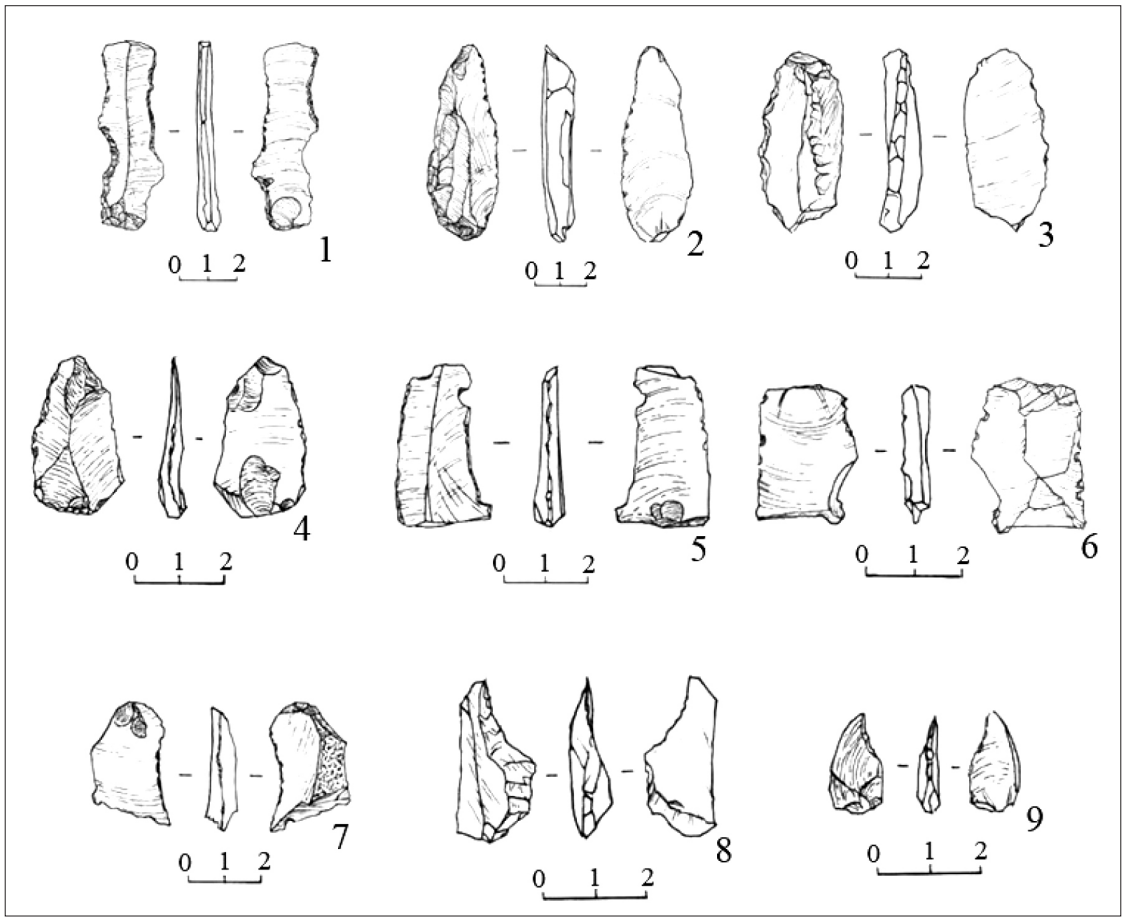

Fig. 4. Obsidian (1,2,4,5,7,8) and flint (3,6,9) tools.

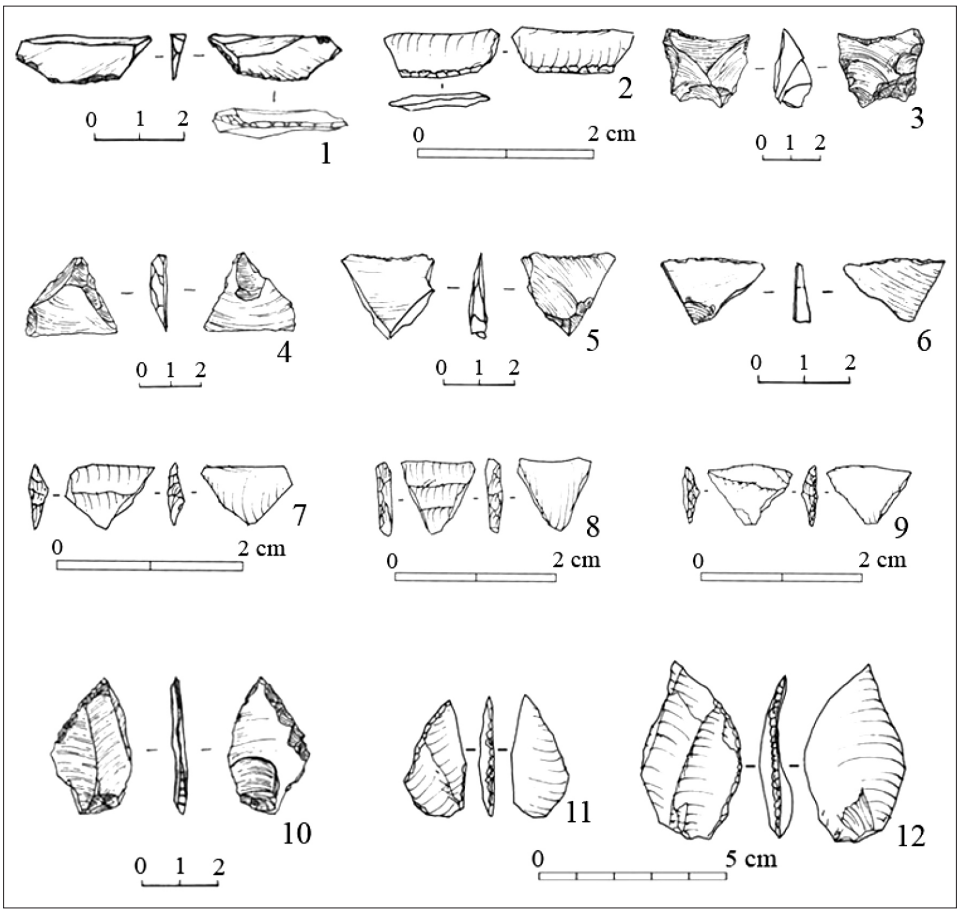

Fig. 5. Obsidian (1-10) and flint (11-12) tools. 1,3,4,5,6,10 – Chagritepe; 2,7,8,9,11,12 – Damjili cave.

covered. Most of such tools are curry-combs and scrapers made on plates and flakes. Besides, there are also great deal of tools made of obsidian such as choppers, shavers, punctures, chisels, etc. Most of the obsidian tools are multifunctional. That is, tools with curry-combs, scrapers, shavers, chisels, etc. functions were made on a plate or fragment. The most common are curry-combs. Both side and end curry-combs were widely used in the settlement. The regional tradition of the method of notching plates is also evident in the finds from Chagritepe. Thus, if the right side of the plate was notched from the upper side, in most cases the left side was notched from the lower side, and vice versa.

Although few, flint tools have also been discovered (fig. 4,3,6,9). Although a significant number of conical and flat flint nuclei, as well as a considerable amount of production waste, have been discovered, the number of tools is not large. However, it should be noted that most of the sickle teeth, one of the main agricultural tools of the Neolithic period, were made of flint. Among other flint tools, curry-combs predominate.

Obsidian and flint tools with a beak-like protrusion on one side and hook-shaped tools were discovered at Chagritepe, (fig. 4,5-9). They are reminiscent of similar tools found in southeastern Anatolia at Çayönü (8th-7th millennia BC), in the Kmlo camp in Armenia, and at early Neolithic camps in Georgia. Such tools were used in Kmlo, from the 9th to the 5th millennia BC [Arimura *et all*. 2010, 78-79]. Of course, the Chagritepe tools differ somewhat in their processing (notching) technique from the tools of the above-mentioned monuments. However, a general tradition is observed.

Some of the obsidian and flint tools discovered in the lower horizons at Chagritepe are archaic in nature and retain some features of an older stage. Among them, triangle-shaped tools made of obsidian, tools resembling trapeze and

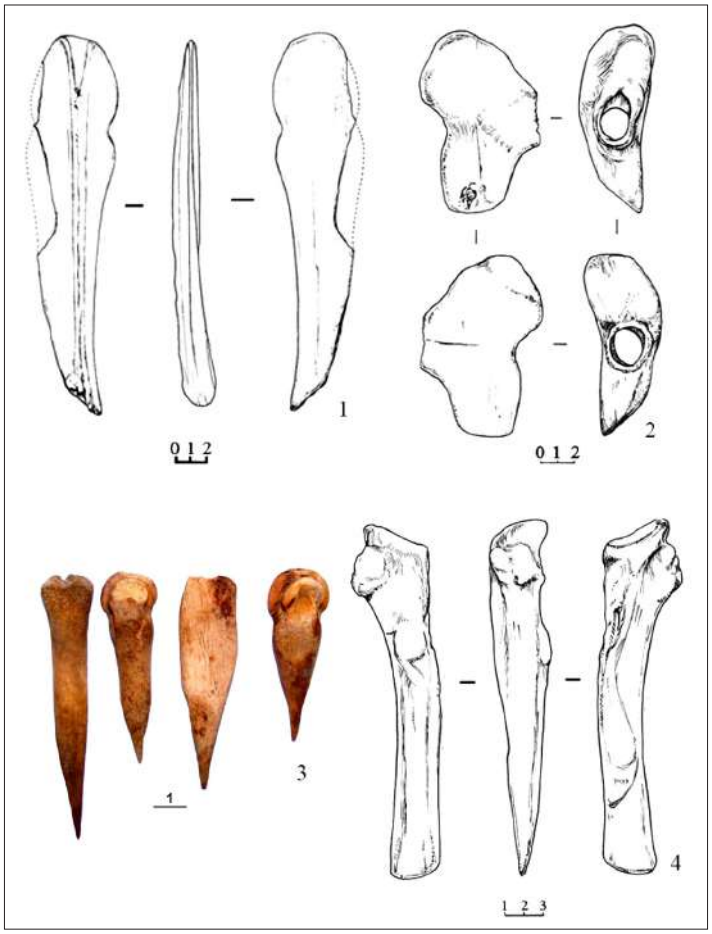

Fig. 6. Bone product. 1 – Anthropomorphic figure; 2 – hammer; 3 – awls; 4 – a polishing tool.

segment shapes (Lunate) can be noted (fig. 5,1,-6). Such tools are known from the Mesolithic and Neolithic layers of the nearby Damjili Cave (fig. 5,2,7-9) [Damjili Cave 2025, fig. 8.5, 8.12]. A certain group of obsidian products is made up of microtools. Of course, although all these tools do not exactly repeat the Mesolithic tools, they are certain remnants of the tradition of that period. This, in turn, indicates the presence of a local factor in the emergence of early production – agricultural culture in the Middle Kura basin.

At the same time, the closest analogies of the obsidian pointed tool with one side notched on both sides (fig. 5,10) found at Chagritepe are known from the Mesolithic layer of Damjili (fig. 5,11-12). Two asymmetric punctures made of flint were found in that layer [Damjili Cave 2025, fig. 8.13, 2-3].

Bone tools

The discovered bone tools are awls, punchers and polishers (fig. 6). All these tools were made from the bones of neat and small cattle. In square 1A, at a depth of 2.2 m, at the bottom of the southern wall, a bone hammer-type tool was discovered (fig. 6,2). This tool was very accurately made from the neat cattle bone. Its surface was well smoothed, a hole was made in the middle by carving to pass a wooden handle, and the lower working side was cut slantwise. It is not exception that this "hammer" was used for ritual purposes. Bone tools constitute an important database on the economy and craftsmanship of the ancient inhabitants of Chagritepe and the early Neolithic agricultural and pastoral population of the region in general.

Conclusion

Archaeological excavations have shown that the Chagritepe settlement is a very valuable monument for the study of the Neolithic Shomutepe culture, the economy and spiritual culture of the Neolithic inhabitants of the region. The dense discovery of about 40 structures in the excavation

area indicates that the settlement continued intensively and continuously for a long time, approximately 300-400 years. The tools made by the inhabitants of the settlement from obsidian and flint are typical of early farming and cattle breeding. At the same time, a number of archaic tools have been discovered here, which have retained some of the features of an earlier period – the Mesolithic period. The excavations conducted in Chagritepe are very important for studying the history of the emergence and development of the Neolithic production economy in the middle Kura basin.

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