



Institutul
de Cercetări
Bioarheologice
și Etnoculturale

Revista

de Arheologie, Antropologie
și Studii interdisciplinare

Journal of Archaeology, Anthropology
and Interdisciplinary Studies

5

2023

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Revista de Arheologie, Antropologie și Studii Interdisciplinare (RAASI) este publicația anuală a Institutului de Cercetări Bioarheologice și Etnoculturale (ICBE) din Chișinău.

Revista de Arheologie, Antropologie și Studii Interdisciplinare (RAASI) este indexată în bazele de date internaționale [CEEOL](#) și [ERIHPLUS](#).



Editare și tipar: Bons Offices

ISSN: 2587-3768

E-ISSN: 2587-3776

Chișinău 2023

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Palaeoanthropological note about Buzeyir necropolis (Southeastern Azerbaijan)

Dmitriy A. Kirichenko¹

Abstract. Through this note, new palaeoanthropological materials from the southeastern region of Azerbaijan are introduced into scientific circulation. Our aim is to discuss craniological materials from the burials of the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age archaeological culture of Talysh-Mughan (Lerik district, Azerbaijan). The studied skull from Buzeyir necropolis is the single material that represents the population of the Lerik region in this period, which was studied by craniometric data and by palaeopathology. The male skull that we refer to is in a good state of preservation. It was found in a stone chamber in which multiple burials were discovered. The cephalic index is dolichocranic, and belongs to the southern branch of the Caucasian phenotype of the Caspian anthropological type. The male skull (like the female skull from grave No. 3, studied at the end of the last century by the anthropologist R. M. Kasimova) belonged to the autochthonous population of Azerbaijan. The Caspian anthropological type/phenotype was represented in the territory of Azerbaijan in all historical periods, from the Mesolithic to the present day. The so-called “Eagle’s syndrome” was identified, an anomaly that has not been reported so far in craniological material from the territory of the Caucasus. Such cases have only been described in contemporary clinical practice.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Late Bronze – Early Iron Ages, Talysh-Mughan archaeological culture, physical anthropology, paleopathology.

Notă paleoantropologică despre necropola Buzeyir (sud-estul Azerbaidjanului). Prin această notă sunt introduse în circulația științifică noi materiale paleoantropologice din regiunea de sud-est a Azerbaidjanului. Scopul nostru este să prezentăm câteva date craniologice din mormintele culturii arheologice din bronzul târziu – epoca timpurie a fierului din Talysh-Mughan (districtul Lerik, Azerbaidjan). Craniul studiat din necropola Buzeyir este singurul material disponibil care reprezintă populația din regiunea Lerik în această perioadă. Acesta a fost studiat biomorfometric și paleopatologic. Craniul, care este într-o stare bună de conservare, provine dintr-o cameră de piatră, unde au fost descoperite mai multe înmormântări. Indicele cefalic este doliocran și aparține ramurii sudice a fenotipului caucazian de tip caspic. Craniul masculin (ca și craniul feminin din mormântul nr. 3, studiat la sfârșitul secolului trecut de antropologul R. M. Kasimova) aparține populației autohtone a Azerbaidjanului. Tipul/fenotipul antropologic caspic a fost reprezentat pe teritoriul Azerbaidjanului în toate perioadele istorice, de la mezolitic până în zilele noastre. A fost identificat așa-numitul „sindrom al

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vulturului”, anomalie care nu a fost semnalată până acum pe materialul craniologic de pe teritoriul Caucazului. Astfel de cazuri au fost descrise doar în cazurile clinice contemporane.

Cuvinte cheie: Azerbaidjan, bronz târziu – epoca timpurie a fierului, cultura arheologică Talysh-Mughan, antropologie fizică, paleopatologie.

.....

Anthropological materials from the southeastern districts of Azerbaijan dated to the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age have not yet been studied. Archaeological excavations in the Lerik region of Azerbaijan carried out by the brothers Jacques and Henri de Morgan at the end of the 19th century, despite the large number of burials studied, have remained untouched by anthropologists.

Only two skulls from these excavations are preserved in the National Museum of Archaeology at the Palais Saint-Germain (Yvelines Department, France), but they have not been analysed by physical anthropologists. This note refers to anthropological materials from the Buzeyir necropolis (**Fig. 1**).



Fig. 1. Location of the archaeological site.

Fig. 1. Localizarea sitului arheologic².

This note refers to anthropological materials from Buzeyir necropolis (**Fig. 1**). The archaeological site is located 7-8 km south of the eponymus village in the district of the Azerbaijan Republic (Narimanov 1999, p. 12).

² <https://www.google.com/maps/place/B%C3%BCzeyir,+Azerbaijan/@40.3110366,48.2371489,7z/data=!4m6!3m5!1s0x4022ed1265551575:0x9943d613bc639b54!8m2!3d38.7268206!4d48.3963779!16s%2Fm%2F04gpbnt?entry=ttu>

The necropolis was accidentally discovered at an altitude of about 2000 m above sea level on a flat part of the peak of Mount Buzeyir. Only a few burials were investigated in which an axe, sword blades, and bronze daggers, as well as other objects were found (Narimanov 1999, p. 82; Karimov 2006).

The archaeological excavations were carried out in August 1999, coordinated by I. G. Narimanov (Narimanov 1999; Narimanov 1999).

We do not have complete archaeological information about each grave of Buzeyir necropolis, because the illness and premature death of I. G. Narimanov (the archaeologist who excavated this site) did not allow him to publish the necropolis materials in more detail. Therefore, we have only minimal information about this interesting archaeological site.

The burials were built of huge slabs of stone lined with stones forming disc-shaped platforms. Twenty human skulls were found in one of the burials plundered in antiquity. Among the grave goods are about 50 small grey single-handled jugs, carnelian, bronze, glass and jasper beads, bronze pendants, needles, bracelets and rings, fragments of an iron bracelet and a knife-like object, two conical clay whorls, bronze arrowheads of the so-called “Scythian type” (Narimanov 1999, p. 82-83).

One of the arrowheads was inside a human skull (Narimanov 1999, p. 82). Three more arrowheads of the same “Scythian” type were found in the grave. The pointed part of the bronze tip of one of the three arrows was bent, which probably occurred when the arrow struck the head/skull and came into contact with the bones during the powerful blow (Karimov 2006, p. 29).

I. G. Narimanov assumed that in the grave were buried people who died in battle with the Scythians (Narimanov 1999) and dates the burial to the second quarter of the 1st millennium BC (Narimanov 1999, p. 83).

A similar case (with the point of the “Scythian” type arrowhead also bent, and the artefact found among the human bones) is that of grave no. 4 of the “stone box” type from Apsheron (Dzhafarzade 1948, p. 88). I. M. Dzhafarzade dates burial no. 4 in the 7th century BC (Dzhafarzade 1948, p. 91).

These facts, perhaps, testify to the military clashes of the local population of Azerbaijan, which gave worthy rebuff to the Scythian invaders during the latter’s advance into Asia Minor.

The burials in Buzeyir necropolis are in “stone boxes”, which have a length of 2-4 m and a width of 1-1.2 m. These were family tombs – crypts with collective burials (Narimanov 1999; Karimov 2006).

Skeletons in a sitting position have also been documented, such as in crypt no. 3 of the necropolis (Narimanov 1999, p. 83).

The Buzeyir Necropolis existed for several centuries. The structure of the crypts, burial rite and ritual, and finds are generally similar or even identical to

the materials discovered by J. de Morgan 25-30 km to the south (Narimanov 1999, p. 83). Buzeyir necropolis belongs to the Talysh-Mughan archaeological culture and dates from the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age (Karimov 2006, p. 31).

Anthropological materials from the Buzeyir necropolis were studied at the end of the last century by R. M. Qasimova. She noticed that the skeleton in crypt no. 3 originated from a middle-aged adult woman and belonged to the southern branch of the Caucasian phenotype, of the Caspian anthropological type (Narimanov 1999, p. 12; Karimov 2006, p. 30).

I studied a skull in a good state of preservation in a museum exhibition named “Scientific Fund and Exhibition” Department of the Institute of Archaeology, Ethnography and Anthropology, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. This skull was probably found in the mass burial crypt together with other 20 skulls.

Craniological material (**Table 1**) was studied according to the methodology recommended by R. Martin (Martin, Saler 1957; Alekseev, Debets 1964). Palaeopathological observations were recorded using methods suggested by several authors (Buzhilova 1995, 1998; Aufderheide, Rodriguez-Martin 1998; Buikstra, Ubelaker 1994; Ortner, Putschar 1981; Ubelaker 1978; Waldron 2008).

No. Martin	♂ 45-50 years old	No. Martin	♂ 45-50 years old
1 (<i>g-op</i>)	184	52	37
8 (<i>eu-eu</i>)	132.8	54	23
5 (<i>n-ba</i>)	106.4	55(n-ns)	56
9 (<i>ft-ft</i>)	90	8:1	72.2
17 (<i>ba-b</i>)	132.4	48:45	62.8
20 (<i>po-b</i>)	122	52:51	86
40 (<i>pr-ba</i>)	98	52:51a	97.4
45 (<i>zy-zy</i>)	127.4	54:55	41
48 (<i>n-pr</i>)	80	77	130.5
51 (<i>mf-ek</i>)	43	∠ Zm	123.2
51a (<i>d-ek</i>)	38	75 (1)	27

Table 1. Craniometrical measurements (mm) of the male skull from collective burial.

Tab. 1. Măsurătorile (în mm) relative ale craniului masculin din înmormântarea colectivă.

The skull belonged to a 45-50 years old adult man. It is dolichocranic, characterised by medium length, very small width and medium height. The frontal bone is narrow. The face is narrow, very high, and well-profiled, with an euryn facial index. The orbits are wide and high, with a hypsiconch orbital index. The nose is narrow, high, and moderately prominent, with a leptorrhine nasal index. Phenotypically, the skull belongs to the southern branch of the Caucasians, the Caspian anthropological type (**Table 1**; **Fig. 2**).



Fig. 2. Male skull from collective burial of Buzeyir necropolis.
Fig. 2. Craniu masculin din înmormântarea colectivă a necropolei Buzeyir.

Among anomalies, we identified stylalgia, also called “Eagle’s syndrome” (Fig. 3/2). Styloid process measurement indicates 4.5 cm. Dental pathologies are represented by antemortem tooth loss of the third left molar (upper jaw, Fig. 3/3), caries in the left first molar (upper jaw) (Fig. 3/3), and an abscess on the right side of the upper jaw (Fig. 3/1).

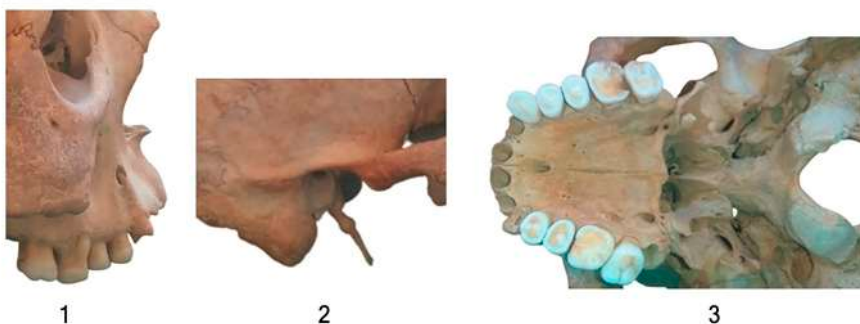


Fig. 3. Anomalies and pathologies. 1. Abscess; 2. “Eagle’s syndrome”;
 3. Caries and antemortem tooth loss.
Fig. 3. Anomalii și patologii. 1. Abces; 2. Stilalgie sau „sindromul Eagle”;
 3. Cariii și pierderi dentare produse antemortem.

“Eagle’s syndrome” was defined and described by American otolaryngologist W. W. Eagle (Eagle 1937). “Eagle’s syndrome” is a condition associated with elongation of the styloid process or calcification of the stylomandibular and stylohyoid ligaments, clinically characterised by throat and neck pain radiating to the ear (Saccomanno *et alii* 2018).

This is the first case of “Eagle’s syndrome” identified in palaeoanthropological material in the territory of Azerbaijan. We do not know of similar cases of this anomaly, even in the territory of the Caucasus.

Manifestations of this deviation have been observed to date, mostly in contemporary clinical practice (Piagkou *et alii* 2009). Regarding anthropological materials from the territory of the Middle East, this syndrome was observed from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages (Ozdemir *et alii* 2013; Uysal 2006; Al-Shorman 2018).

The male skull from the collective burial, as well as the female skull from crypt no. 3, belong to the Caspian anthropological type. The Caspian phenotype is represented in the territory of Azerbaijan in all historical periods from the Mesolithic to the present day (Kirichenko 2020).

The people buried in Buzeyir necropolis belonged to the native population of Azerbaijan.

The materials from the Buzeyir necropolis are currently the only materials that can characterise the anthropological aspect of the population of the Lerik district of Azerbaijan in the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age.

Archaeological research and subsequent anthropological discoveries will help us understand the structure of the population in this region of Azerbaijan in Antiquity.

Acknowledgements. The author expresses his gratitude and appreciation to Dr. F. E. Guliyev for the opportunity to study the anthropological material from the necropolis.

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