

## Pereshchepino Barrow Cemetery

by Vyacheslav Murzin, Renate Rolle

The immense Belsk fortified site of the Scythian period with its area of 4,000 hectares and total length of banks exceeding 36 km, is situated on the banks of the middle part of Vorskla River, the left tributary of the Dnieper. This site, very likely the largest one in Europe, is located in the Ukrainian Forest-Steppe zone where ancient water and land trade communications were crossed. In particular, the environs of the site were crossed by the way known as the Muravsky way in the Middle Agea. That way linked the Crimea and adjacent territories of the Black Sea coast with the inner regions of the Northern Black Sea Littoral (fig. 1).

Barrow necropolis which is westwards of the site is consistent with the size of the site and embraces a number of sepulchres: Skorobor, Osnyagi, Marchenki, Sarancevo pole and others. Es early as at the beginning of this century there were not less than two thousand barrow mounds. Unfortunately application of tractors for deep ploughing of soil has led to disappearance of small barrows in the course of time. In this aspect the Pereshchepino barrow cemetery situated in the northern part of the necropolis (fig. 2) was not an exception. At present there are about twenty barrow mounds both slightly noticeable and those reaching 3 m in height.

In 1980 - 1981 the Kharkov University expedition headed by Professor B.A. Shramko succeeded in excavation of five Pereshchepino barrows. Joint expedition of the Institute of

Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and German Research Society headed by the authors of the report presented works for recent five years in ancient town Belsk and its environs has succeeded in excavation of six barrows more.

So, 11 barrows in all were studied, of them Nos. 5 and 6 are dated the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC and are the most ancient interments of the Scythian type in the Belsk environs. The other barrows were made in the 5<sup>th</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC.

All barrow mounds were excavated by a bulldozer, control sections being retained for studying stratigraphy. As a result in has been found out that mounds were formed of sod plates of rectangular shape, 20 to 50 cm long and 20 to 25 cm wide. In one case (barrow No. 8) a subgrave structure made of sod was strengthened by a ring of rammed silty soil put on the edge of the mound. A ring-shaped small ditch which showed edges of the mound was also found in the barrow No. 6. All these architectural details and building methods are well known from other burial monuments of the Scythian time, in particular from the Scythian barrows of the steppe zone which begins approximately 100 km southwards of Belsk. Burial structures of the Pereshchepino cemetery are more unique.

Usually a mound of the Pereshchepino cemetery covered one grave, except for barrows Nos. 3 and 8, each having two separate interments. In the last case there were found a

grave of a major person and a grave of a warrior who accompanied him. They were made in a wooden burial vault on the level of the ancient horizon. In all other cases interments were made in pits of a rectangular or a close-to-square shape (fig. 3) with dimensions of 2.8 x 2.6 to 6.25 x 5.0 (barrow No. 11). In three barrows: No. 7, No. 8 (interment No. 1) and No. 11 walls of the pit were covered with wood and there was a floor made of wood too. In barrow No. 11 in addition, perches and boards covered the surface of clayey soil upcast from the grave (fig. 3, 1).

Almost all the graves were robbed in ancient time, so findings of grave stock are far from being complete. Arrow heads and bridle pieces (fig. 4) were found most often, swords and fragments of protective armour were met only incidentally. Barrow No. 11 is an exception, as there were found fragments of iron-made composed armour (fig. 5) and rectangular iron plates which strengthened a wooden shield. Antique vessels, and not only amphorae, are found rather often.

Findings from the inlet interment in barrow No. 3 which was not robbed permit imagining to certain extent the stock in graves of the Pereshchepino barrow cemetery. Those findings were as follows: 62 arrows with bronze heads, an iron-made sword with a hilt covered with gold foil, two spears with iron-made heads, two *lecythoi*.

In our opinion this permit attributing most of Pereshchepino barrows to prosperous layers of ordinary population of ancient town Belsk. Belonging to the other type are three burial assemblages with accompanying interments found there: barrow No. 6 - a teenager in the main grave; barrow No. 7 - paired interments of a man and a woman; barrow No. 8 - accompanying interment in a vault on the ancient horizon. Taking into account this attribute, as well as the relative wealth of the stock in the barrows mentioned, it is quite possible to suppose that they were graves of representatives of lower aristocratic layers of Belsk site.

A person buried in barrow No. 11 had even the higher social rank as all the parameters of this barrow stand out not only from other barrows of the Pereshchepino cemetery, but also from the Belsk necropolis on the whole.

We hope that forthcoming investigations of the barrows in the environs of Belsk which we are going to carry out in the nearest future will contribute to further more precise definition of the social structure of the ancient town of Belsk and will throw a new light on its ethnical composition.

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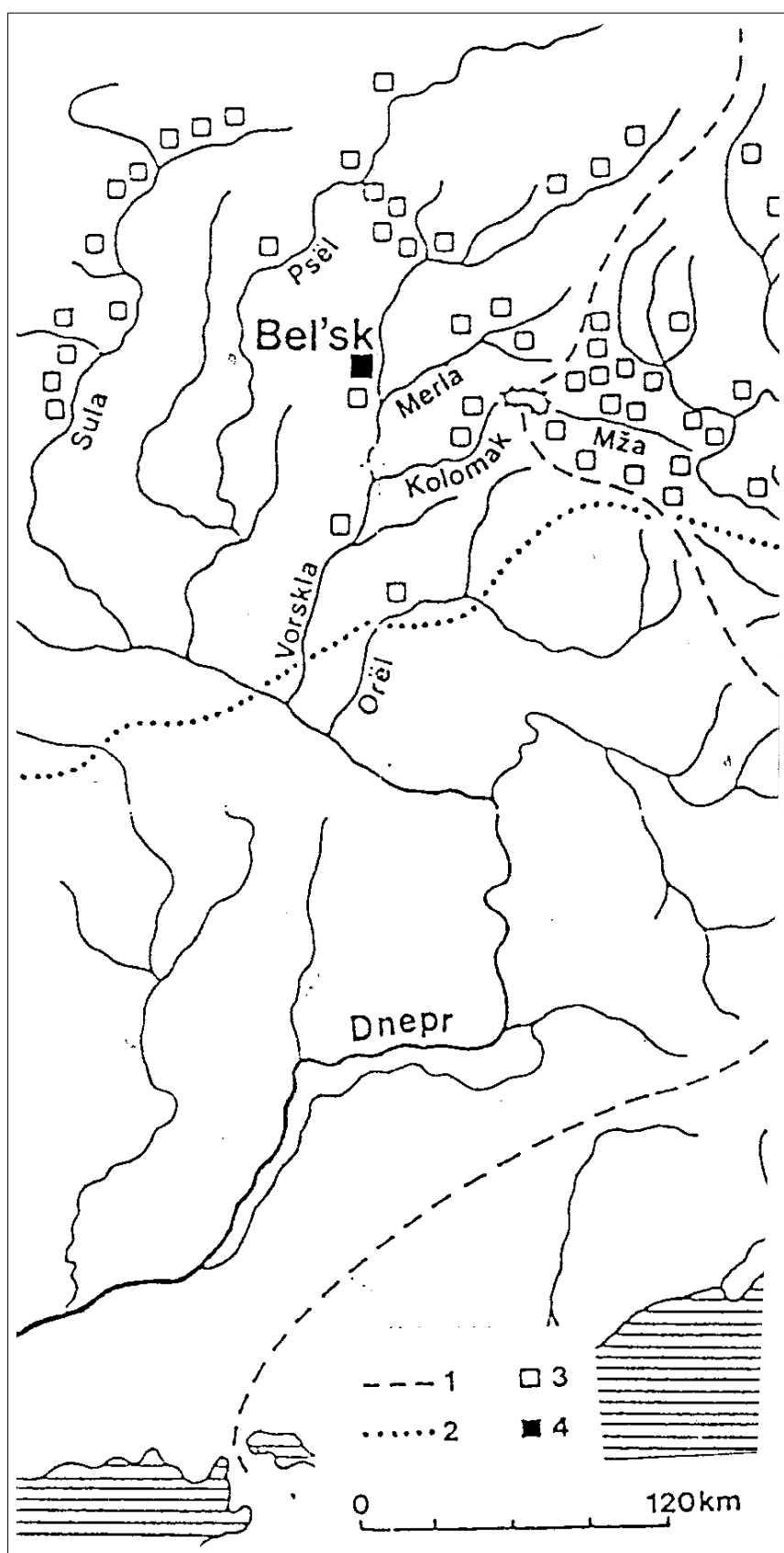


Fig. 1. Location of the Belsk fortified site: 1 - the Muravsky way; 2 - a border between the Steppe and Forest-Steppe; 3 - ancient towns and settlements of the Scythian period; 4 - the Belsk fortified site.

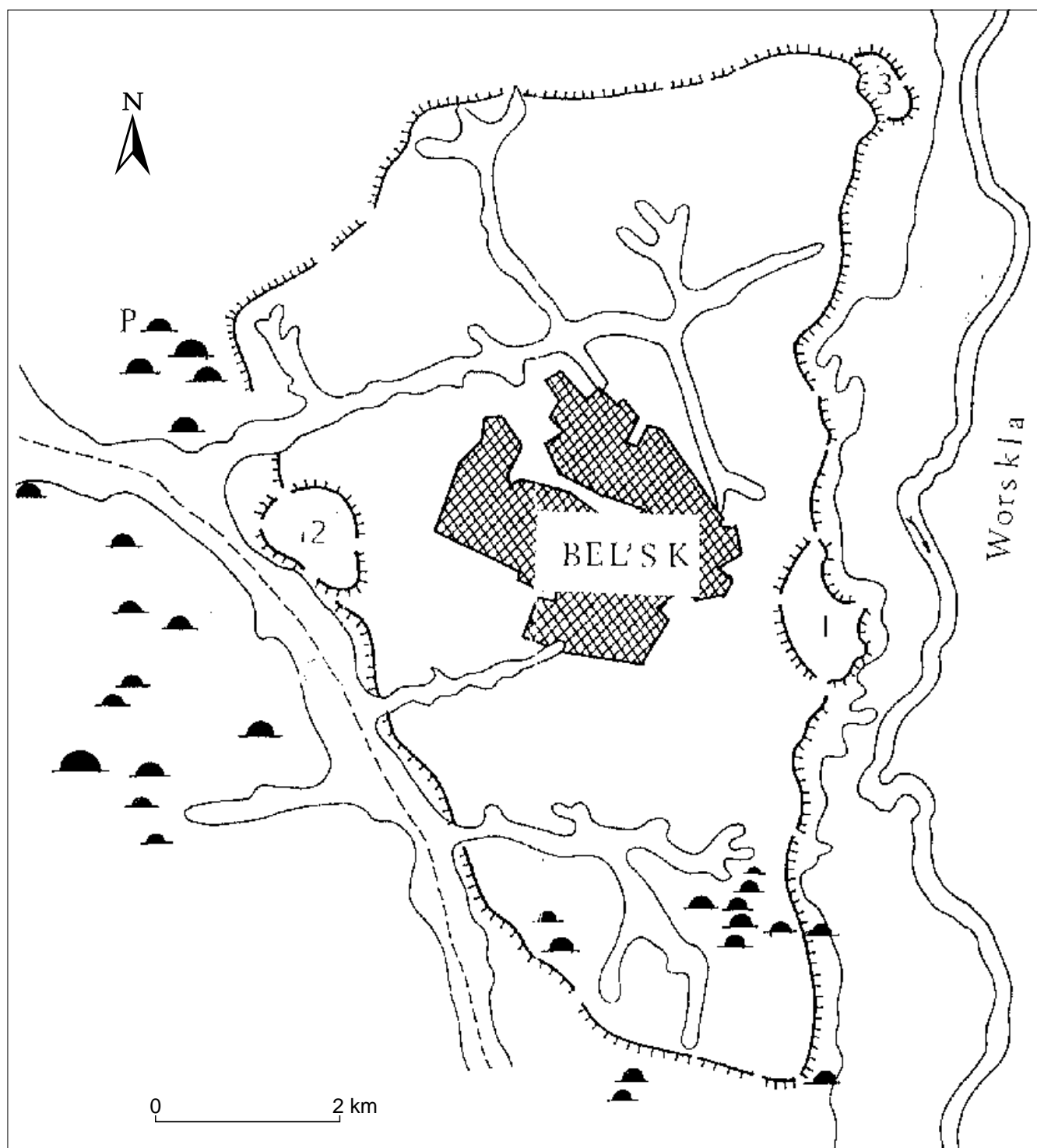


Fig. 2. A map of the Belsk fortified site and barrow cemeteries (P - the Pereshchepino barrow).

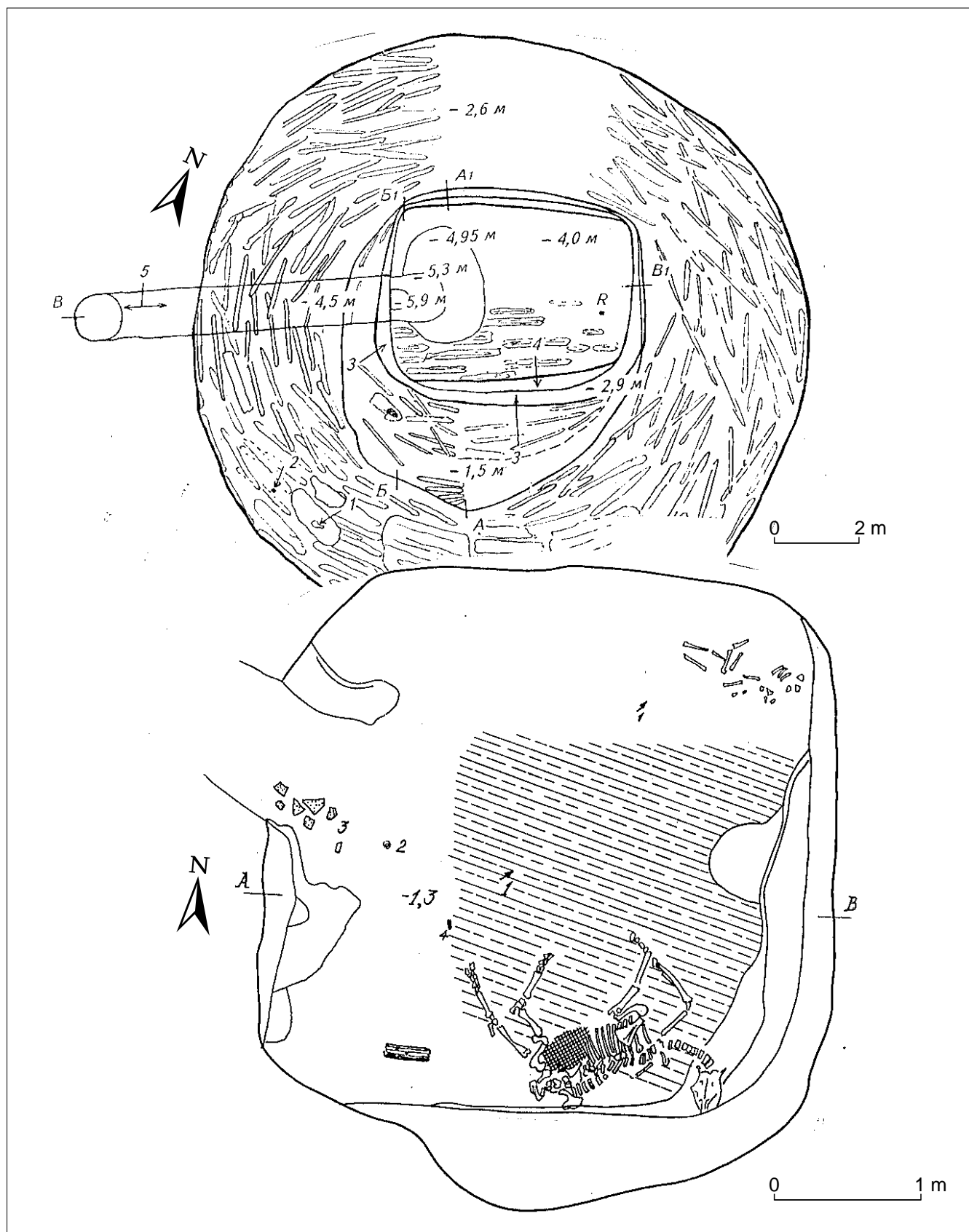


Fig. 3. Burial places of the Pereshchepino barrow: 1 - barrow no. 11; 2 - barrow no. 6.

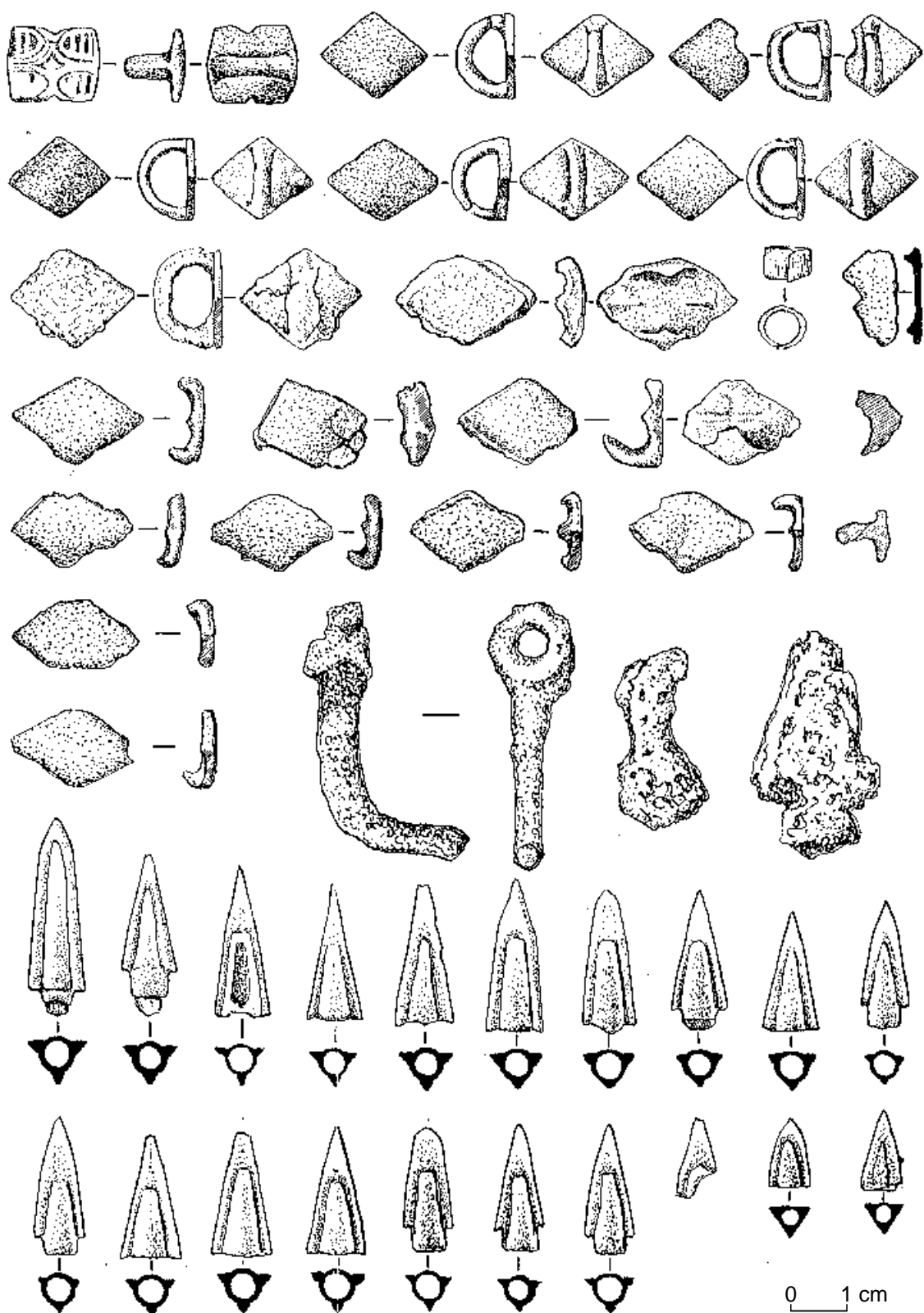


Fig. 4. Bridle pieces and arrow heads from barrow no. 9.

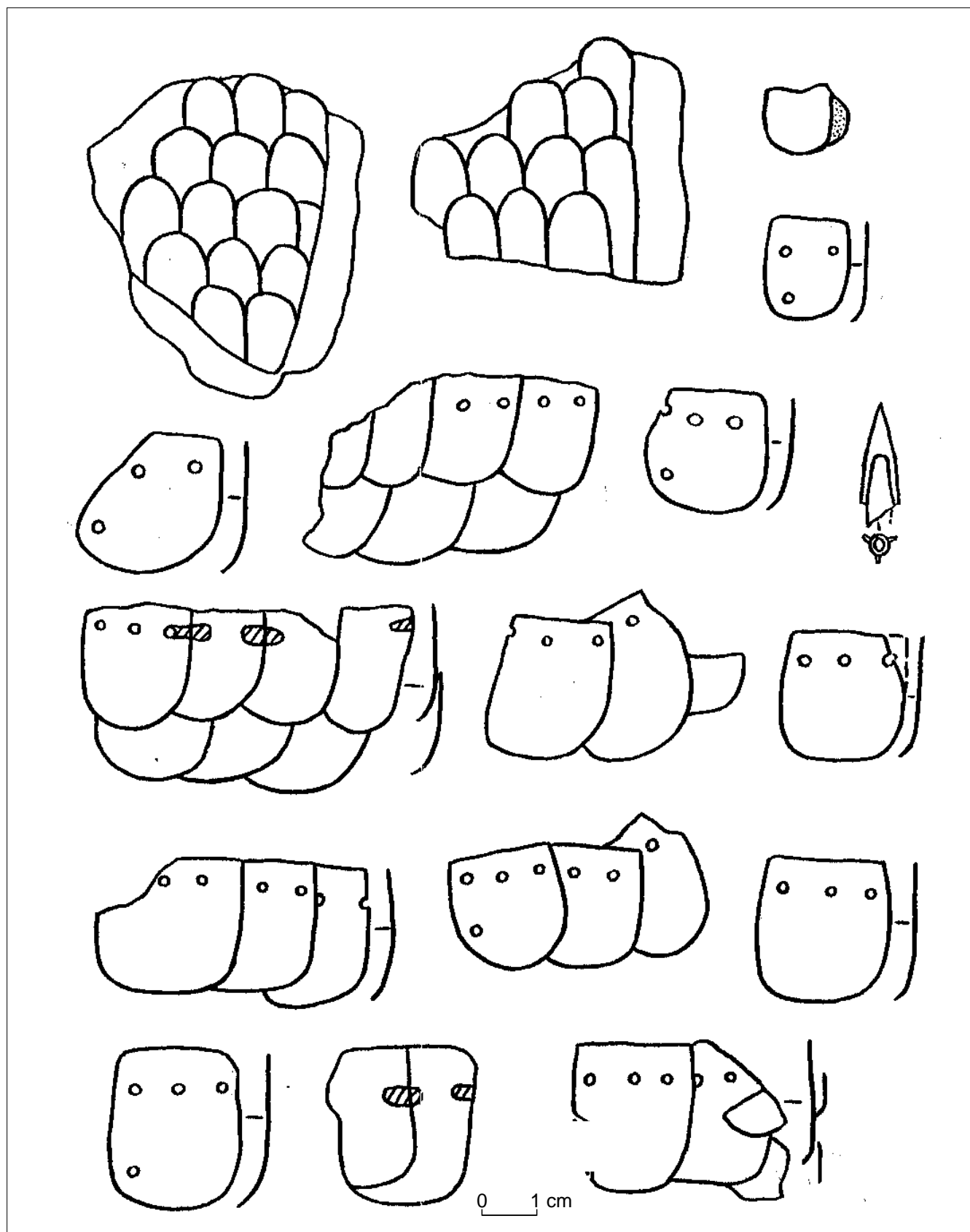


Fig. 5. Fragments of armour and an arrow head from barrow no. 11.

