

Metal garment elements from the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age cemetery at Beshtasheni (eastern Georgia)

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Abstract: The paper presents metal elements of garments and jewellery dating to the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age period (13th–6th century BC) coming from the excavation of the Beshtasheni cemetery in eastern Georgia carried out from the mid-1930s until 2014. A brief historical and cultural background, including a short description and chronology of the Beshtasheni cemetery, is given before presenting the assemblage of metal garment elements found in the graves: pins, belts and buckles, finger rings, bracelets, parts of buckles and beads, including a preliminary typology of some of these artifacts. The typology takes into account the decoration and shape, as well as ornamental elements and motifs. The paper goes on to describe the observed relation between metal garment elements and the gender and age of the deceased.

Keywords: Beshtasheni, bronze, Early Iron Age, Georgia, Late Bronze Age, metal artifacts, dress elements

Excavations in the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age period cemetery in Beshtasheni in southeastern Georgia, carried out from the 1930s through 2014, yielded an assemblage of metal elements consisting of pins, belts, finger rings, bracelets, parts of buckles and beads. These finds have been published separately for the most part, but never studied as a group.

The main objective of the present paper is to reconstruct the manner in which the discussed metal elements of adornment were worn and observe the possible links to gender and age attested in the individual burials. For this purpose the authors present a small catalogue of the finds and a provisional typology of the metal pins category.

THE CEMETERY OF BESHTASHENI: SITE, EXCAVATION AND CHRONOLOGY

The cemetery of Beshtasheni in southeastern Georgia is located on the right bank of the Baiburt-Chai River,

which runs through a fairly deep gorge, separating the burial ground from the settlement which lies in the bifurcation

of this river and the Bashkov-Su stream (G. Narimanishvili 2010: 313; 2012: 89). The archaeological site lies in the territory of Tsalka municipality in the Kvemo Kartli region, on a plateau of the same name as the municipality, which corresponds to it in its extent, and to the northwest of the modern village (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 104) [Fig. 1].

Boris Kuftin, who studied many sites belonging to Kura-Araxes, Trialeti and Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age periods, excavated the settlement and cemetery within the frame of the Tsalka reservoir construction project. Between 1936 and 1941 he discovered and studied 49 pit graves and stone cists (Kuftin 1939: 93;

1941). The cemetery was investigated again between 1991 and 1998 by the Tsalka–Trialeti Archaeological Expedition which explored another 11 graves, starting off a new numbering system that has been continued to this day. Progressive erosion of the riverbanks, which threatened the site of the cemetery, resulted in the Beshtasheni Expedition conducting from 2012 excavations on the site of the cemetery and in the surrounding territory on behalf of the Kldekari Historical-Architectural Museum-Reserve (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 104–105). Graves 12–56, altogether 45 in number, were uncovered between 2012 and 2016.¹ Since 2016 a Georgian–Polish



Fig. 1. Location of the Beshtasheni cemetery and settlement; inset, location of the site and the Kvemo Kartli region in Georgia (Processing R. Bieńkowski; drawing J. Hamburg)

¹ The expedition team included undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate students from various universities, including: Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, University of Warsaw, Georgian National Agrarian University, Tbilisi

Joint Archaeological Expedition has been operating within the frame of an official agreement signed between the Georgian National Museum and the University of Warsaw. The main part of the excavation was conducted to the west of the ancient settlement site, near the road from Beshtasheni village to Khareba (earlier Saphar-Kharaba) village.

The Beshtasheni cemetery is dated to the 13th–6th century BC and is divided into two phases corresponding to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age periods (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 104). The graves can be dated on typological grounds, verified by a few radiocarbon dates on human bones, which still need to be confirmed by more specialized research (samples from graves 19, 21 and 29 in verification, as yet unpublished).

The beginning of the Late Bronze Age in Georgia corresponds to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC (Kušnareva 1997: 81). A number of chronological systems have been suggested for the chronology of the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age periods, stipulating sometimes consi-

derably different divisions, e.g., systems proposed by Michael Abramishvili (1957), Arutyun Martirosyan (1964), Konstantin Pitskhelauri (1990), Nino Akhvlediani (2005: 257) and Adam Smith (Smith, Badalyan, and Avetisyan 2009: 29–33, 39–40, 68–90). Most of these chronological systems place the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age between 1500–700/600 BC.² The main difficulty with the South Caucasus chronology is determining the date of the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, which is traditionally identified with a very early adoption of iron on a larger scale (Smith, Badalyan, and Avetisyan 2009: 40). Martirosyan (1964: 81–293, 299–305) placed the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age around 900–800 BC, while Pitskhelauri (1990: 248–249) set the break at 1000 BC and the end of the Early Iron Age at 700 BC. For Smith, the Early Iron Age (which he renamed as Iron I) started relatively early, in 1150 BC (Smith, Badalyan, and Avetisyan 2009: 29–30, 34, Fig. 2), but his research has focused mainly on archaeological sites and artifacts found in the territory of modern Armenia.

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Remains of metal and pottery workshops have been found on a large number of Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age cemetery and settlement sites in eastern Georgia. The advanced technology of the period is well attested in the metalwork. The Late Bronze

Age metal artifacts were made of alloys of many elements (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2007: 18). The Beshtasheni metalwork is represented by weapons, such as daggers, spearheads, arrowheads, axes, and parts of horse harness (Kuftin 1941: 60), as well as

Free University, Jagiellonian University, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 104–105), University of Wrocław and students from the Mtsignobartukhutsesi secondary school (D. Narimanishvili 2014: 69).

² The first half of the 6th century BC is considered as the beginning of the so-called pre-antique period in the territory of Georgia. From the beginning of this century eastern Georgia was occupied with lesser intensity, whereas the rather different Colchian Culture developed in western Georgian, see Braund 1994.

jewellery and garment accessories in the form of pins, belts (Kuftin 1941: 66–68), finger rings, bracelets, parts of buckles and beads (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106–108).

There is a large body of evidence for artifacts of this kind from the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites in the Tsalka Region. Settlements from this period were excavated at Eli-Baba (Shanshashvili and G. Narimanishvili 2012: 179), Avranlo (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2010: 384), Bareti (G. Narimanishvili and Shanshashvili 2001: 9), Santa, Gumbati (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2007: 18), and Knole (G. Narimanishvili 2010: 89), while cemeteries were found at Beshtasheni, Khareba (G. Narimanishvili and Shanshashvili 2001: 9) and Avranlo (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2010: 387) and again in Eli-Baba (Murvanidze 2010: 417), as well as in many cyclopean complexes in the nearby highlands.

The first artifacts made of iron appeared at this time but bronze, being the malleable material it is, remained in common use, alongside iron, mainly for decorative purposes. This is evidenced by some bronze belts decorated with a great variety of incised ornaments inscribed into geometric figures, waves, chevrons and schematic animal and human figures (Khidasheli 1982: 139–144).

The Late Bronze Age was a period when the proto-Kartvelian tribes and their political alliances emerged in the ancient Near East (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2007: 19). Assyrian and Urartian written sources provide the first references to the proto-Kartvelian tribes and states from this time (A. Sagona and C. Sagona 2005: 30). No other written sources exist on the local societies in the Late Bronze

Age and Early Iron Age specifically from the territory of Georgia, but the material culture is richly represented at several archaeological sites as mentioned above (mainly cemeteries), e.g., the Late Bronze Age Khareba cemetery, located just 2.2 km north of the Beshtasheni site discussed in this paper, excavated in 2003–2005 within the frame of the British Petroleum pipeline construction project (G. Narimanishvili et al. 2007: 10).

The graves of Beshtasheni are of the pit burial type, usually covered with pebbles of different size or earth, or the two combined; stone slabs were also used. Some of the burials had a layer of threshing(?) stones either below or above the skeleton. In almost all the cases the deceased were buried with their heads to

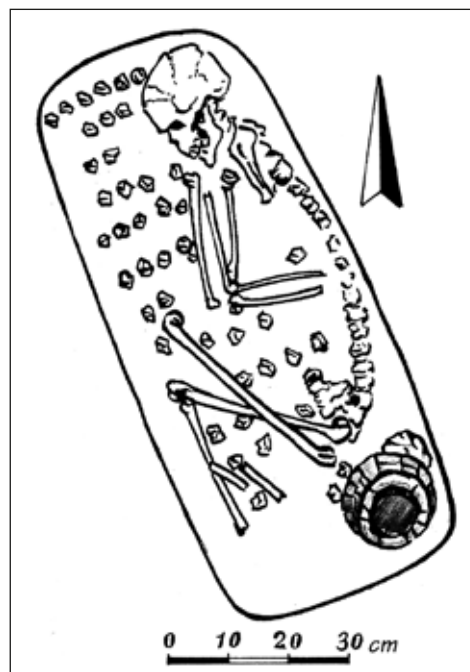


Fig. 2. Grave 13 excavated in the Beshtasheni cemetery in 2012 (Drawing G. Tatishvili)

the north (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 105) [*Fig. 2*]. Graves in the form of stone boxes were also recorded (Kuftin 1941: 65). A more

detailed characteristic of the graves comes from the recent excavations at the site in 2012–2014 (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015).

THE ARTIFACTS

The collection of metal artifacts discussed here, not including weaponry, comes from the excavations at the Beshtasheni cemetery site conducted, at intervals, from the 1930s through 2014. It includes clothing elements and jewellery items, such as A) pins (four general types), B) belts, C) bracelets and finger rings, D) buckles and shanks (three types); and E) beads [*Table 1*].

A. PINS

Pins from the Beshtasheni cemetery represent a wide selection of shapes and decoration methods, and can be divided into four general types [*Fig. 3*].

I. Pins with wide heads

Petal-shaped in section. Length from 13.7 to 20.6 cm.

a) Body decorated with ribs, a dot placed on each rib;

b) Body decorated with a vertical band, filled with a chevron or herring-bone motif.

II. Pins with spiral heads

Body round in section. Length from 11.1 to 16.1 cm. Top one third to one half of the shaft decorated with a twisting continuous line or with incised multiple vertical chevrons.

III. Pins with either flat or rounded head

a) Length from 8.2 to 16 cm. This kind has a flat head with ribbing just under it and a hole through the shaft below the ribs. The head can be decorated with three additional tabs.

b) Length from 9.5 to 16 cm. Pins of this kind have rounded heads and a hole at a quarter-length of the pin below the head. Some are decorated with wide segments separated by narrow hoops just under the head. The shaft of the pins widens around the section with the hole.

IV. Pins without distinct head

Body oblong in section. Length from 15 to 28 cm. The body is decorated with vertical chevrons and herring-bone motifs.

B. BELTS

The four belts from the burials excavated at Beshtasheni were richly decorated with a variety of incised and excised ornaments. Motifs included geometrical figures like triangles, crosshatching patterns, chevrons, spirals, waves, as well as schematic figures of animals, most probably from the Equidae or Cervidae taxa, and of humans. Some of the depictions appear to have made up narrative scenes.

The bronze belt from Grave 21, excavated in 2013, depicts a hunting scene. Two horsemen, armed with bows, are shown in the act of shooting arrows. They are rendered at the two ends of the belt, facing to the right, in each case with two other horses abreast. One of these seems to be led on a rope by the horseman, the others are shown loose. Between the two groups is a central panel surrounded by a decorative band composed of two bands of dots,

separated by a zigzag and fringed with dot-filled triangles. On either side of the panel are images of horned animals, two at the top between the horsemen and three at the bottom, between the loose horses. A line of seven horned animals, the first slightly distanced from the rest, is shown inside the panel. These animals are smaller in size than their counterparts on the outside margin. A band of the same kind of ornament as that around the central panel delineates two triangular panels near either end of the belt, the apices of these panels pointing in. Filling

the triangles are five horizontal bands of dots with a fringe of dot-filled triangles. Snakes and tortoises are depicted in the lower left and upper right corners of the scene, while the representations in the upper left and lower right corners may be interpreted as water birds. An elaborate decorative band composed of a double band of dotted zigzag fringed with dotted triangles runs around the edges of the belt. This belt is about 85 cm long (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106–107) [Fig. 4:a]. It should be kept in mind



Fig. 3. Pins found at the Beshtasheni cemetery: I–IV – four different types (Photos D. Narimanishvili; processing K. Pawłowska)

that the belt was found in pieces and the reconstruction as presented here fails to take into consideration one fragment that bears the representation of a most probably unmounted human figure.

The bronze belt from Grave 25, excavated in 2014, is decorated with bands of geometrical patterns. The band running around the edge of the belt consists of a band of crosshatching between two

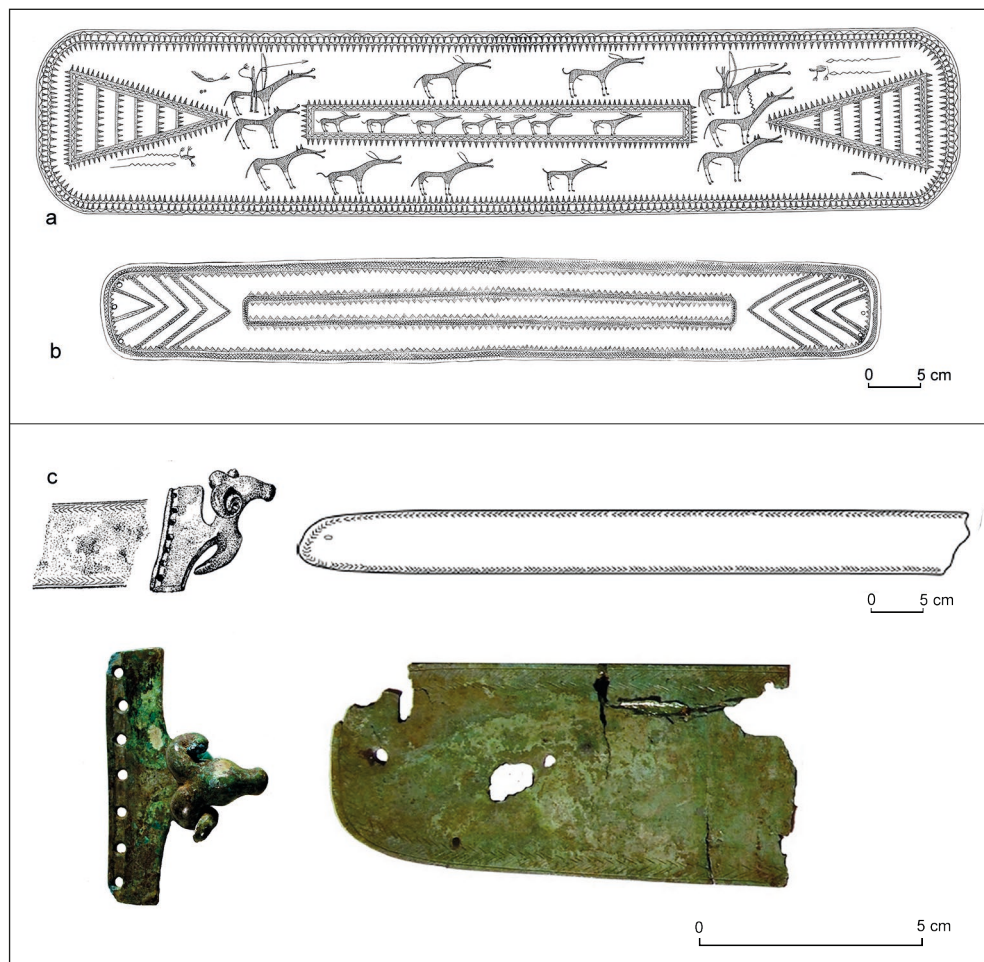


Fig. 4. Bronze belts and buckles from the Beshtasheni cemetery: a – belt with a hunting scene (reconstruction), from Grave 21; b – belt with geometric decoration (reconstruction), from Grave 25; c – undecorated belt, with ornate buckle, from Kuftin's excavation (reconstruction); bottom right, fragment of belt; bottom left, zoomorphic buckle with a ram's head (Drawing I. Esvanjia; K. Pawłowska; and (c) after Castelluccia 2017: Pl. 20:84; processing K. Pawłowska; bottom right, after Kuftin 1941: Fig. 70 and photos D. Narimanishvili)

bands of dots, fringed with triangles filled with diagonal hatching. The same kind of ornamental band, but proportionately smaller and with triangles fringing both sides, sets off a long rectangular panel in the middle. Five V-shaped bands, the apices pointing in, appear at either end of the belt; they are filled with either crosshatching or a herringbone pattern. At either end of the belt there are three holes for attaching the fastening straps. This belt is about 70 cm long [see *Fig. 4:b*].

Kuftin's excavations in the 1930s yielded four belts. One had a very simple decoration consisting of a continuous line of chevrons running around the edge and a single hole at either end for lacing the leather strap. This belt was about 60 cm long. A second belt, fragmentarily preserved, featured a slightly rounded end with a hole in the centre for the fastening; the decoration consisted of a continuous herringbone band running along the edge and two additional vertical rows of the same decoration near the hole. The third was preserved only as three rather small fragments, most probably from the upper or lower central part of the belt, including part of an edge featuring a herringbone decoration.

The last belt, undecorated except for a continuous line of chevrons around the edge, is still one of the most interesting in Kuftin's collection because of a bronze zoomorphic buckle in the shape of an animal's head that came with it [see *Fig. 4:c*]. The head resembles a ram or a mouflon with prominent spiraling horns; the front legs were shaped to hook into the strap. The flat piece to which this ornament was attached had seven holes spaced in a vertical line along the opposite edge for fastening to the belt. A single rounded

hole at the other end of the belt would have served to hook the buckle [see *Fig. 4* bottom right].

Geometric and figurative motifs similar in style to those occurring in the set of the decorated belts are common on finds from this period and region (Castelluccia 2017: 16). One of the best parallels for the zoomorphic buckle from Beshtasheni comes from Grave 208 in Tlia located in South Ossetia and consists of two decorated belts linked to bronze buckles representing animal heads resembling rams (Tehov 1980: Pl. 90). Zoomorphic buckles with a representation of stylized animal heads with spiral horns were also found in Abkhazia (Castelluccia 2017: 27), at the Kulanurchva cemetery, for example, where two belts with ram-like head buckles were discovered; these finds were dated to the 9th century BC (Trapš 1970: Pls 1 and 3).

Late Bronze and Early Iron Age metal belts are known from other archaeological sites from the territory of Georgia (e.g., Tlia, Samtavro, Trel'i) and also from Iran, Armenia, western Azerbaijan and southern Russia. Certain typical features, such as the style and techniques of decoration, make them recognizable throughout the Caucasus (Castelluccia 2017: 11). The belts from the Hasanlu citadel and cemetery, several made of copper/bronze sheet, are not all surely identified as belts owing to their poor state of preservation (Rubinson 2012: 393). Those from Märlik in Iran (Negahban 1996), also mostly fragmentary, are distinguished from the other Caucasian belts by the end parts which are neither square nor round, but are rather decorated with two spirals resembling the head decoration of some distinctive Caucasian-style pins.

Metal belts were also in use in the Kingdom of Urartu, which existed from

the 9th to the 7th century BC. While the archaeological context for most of them is not precisely identified (Castelluccia 2017: 12), they come from regular and documented excavations which are confined to the burial context, and several of the specimens were found in buildings inside cities or fortresses (e.g., Karmir-Blur, Rubinson 2012: 392) and in one case inside a *susi*-type temple at Erebuni (Esayan 1984: 133). Compared to the belts from modern Georgia, the Urartian belts feature a richer decoration, which is rendered with greater accuracy and realism with regard to figures and animals; the decoration is also more apt to include images of fantastic creatures. The

fastening method is also different than in the Caucasian belts. Generally, the Urartian belts are equipped with a buckle consisting of a hook and ring placed at opposite ends of the belt (Castelluccia 2017: 12–13).

C. BRACELETS AND FINGER RINGS

Bracelets were usually discovered near or on the wrist or forearm of the buried individual and rarely around the ankles (Kuftin 1941: 71). The two bracelets from Grave 19, found on the wrists of a female skeleton, were of a simple form, open-ended, the body rounded in section. The maximum diameter was 12 cm [Fig. 5:a–b].

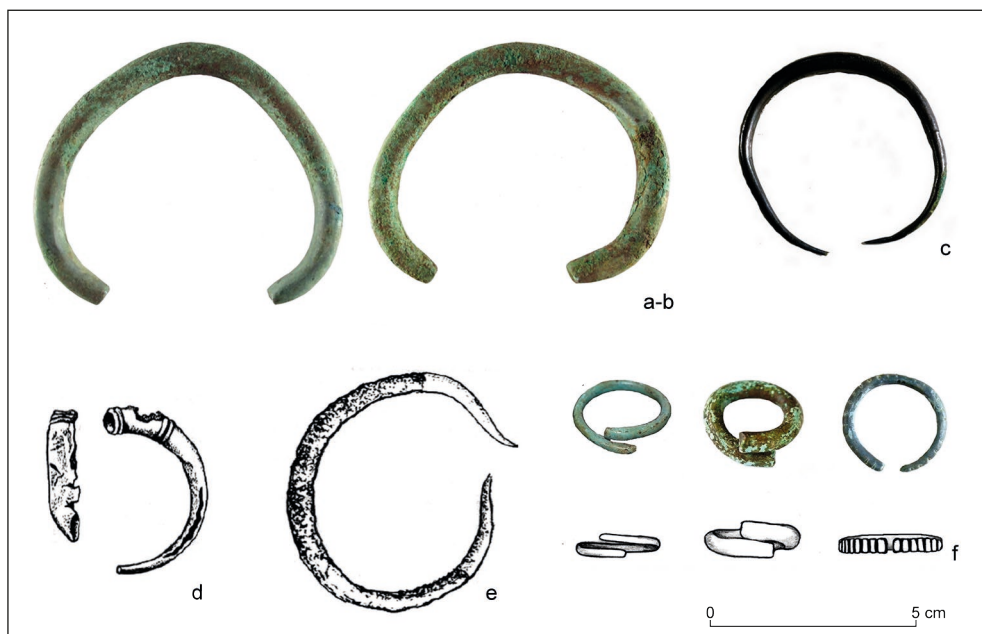


Fig. 5. Bracelets from the burials in Beshtasheni: a–b – two simple open bracelets from Grave 19; c – open bracelet plated with electrum(?) from Grave 20 KUF; d – fragment of a bracelet with decoration in the form of segmental hoops; e – bracelet with one gold-capped end; f – finger rings (a–b – after D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: Pl. III:2-3; c – photo D. Narimanishvili; d, e – after Kuftin 1941: Fig. 79:3–4,6; f – after D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: Pl. VI:6–8; processing K. Pawłowska)

One of the bracelets is probably made of bronze and is faced with electrum(?) [Fig. 5:c]. A group of bracelets from the Beshtasheni cemetery has decoration in the form of segmental hoops (Kuftin 1941: 69, 74, 323) [Fig. 5:d]. They are made of bronze and one of them was found with gold cap applied to one of the sharp endings [Fig. 5:e]. Other similar exemplars are heavily damaged and broken into small pieces.

Bronze finger rings were found in Graves 27 and 29 (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108). Most of them are undecorated or have very simple grooved decoration [Fig. 5:f]. In terms of execution, rings can be divided into two types: open and closed. The closed ones, with overlapping ends, may have been made by less experienced craftsmen, compared with the decorated and open forms. The open forms are characterized by a much gentler image, detailed decoration and could have been made by more skilled craftsmen. The average diameter of these artifacts is 2–3 cm.

D. BUCKLES AND SHANKS

Buckles were found mainly near the ribs of the skeletons, indicating that they could have been used to fasten sword belts (Kuftin 1941: 73) or a simple leather strap on the chest. These artifacts consisted of a metal ring, a shank and a spike.

The shanks differed in shape. The first kind is like a cylindrical earplug and is 5 cm long [Fig. 6:a]. An example was found in 2013 in Grave 17, while another one is known from Kuftin's excavation [Fig. 6:a left, c]. The ends of the second kind, also found by Kuftin, are similar to a modern chess pawn; these shanks are 7 cm long [Fig. 6:d]. In both kinds, the constriction in the middle was intentional, most probably, for a spike or for tying a string (for example, with a needle(s)?, found at the Samtavro cemetery, see Kuftin 1941: Fig. 70). The third kind is straight, 6 cm long, slightly narrowing toward the center where there is a rectangular hole; examples were found by Kuftin (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108). The hole has the same function as the indentation in



Fig. 6. Buckle rings and shanks: a–b – cylindrical earplug-like shank and metal ring; c – metal buckle ring from Kuftin's excavation; d – cylindrical earplug-like shank from Kuftin's excavation; e – shank with rounded caps at the ends; f – straight shank found with the buckle ring (c) (a – after D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: Pl. II:5; b–e – photo D. Narimanishvili; processing K. Pawłowska)

the other shanks and was probably used to pass a string through it for fastening items [Fig. 6:e].

Bronze rings were also found, one in Grave 17 together with the shank (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108), and similar ones in burials excavated by Kuftin's expedition. The former are large and octagonal in cross-section [see Fig. 6:a right], the latter look big and are rhomboid in shape with slightly rounded edges in cross-section [Fig. 6:b].

E. BEADS

Two gold beads, coming from Kuftin's excavations, are unique at Beshtasheni [Fig. 7]. They were made from extremely thin gold foil and were hollow inside. Other beads from the burials were not of metal, being made of reddish and white carnelian,

frit paste or animal bones. An exceptional non-metal discovery came from a child burial in Grave 22: 17 apparent beads made from ankle bones of sheep/goat, presumably threaded to form a necklace that probably served as an amulet (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 107). These ornaments vary in size from 2.8 cm to 3.7 cm.

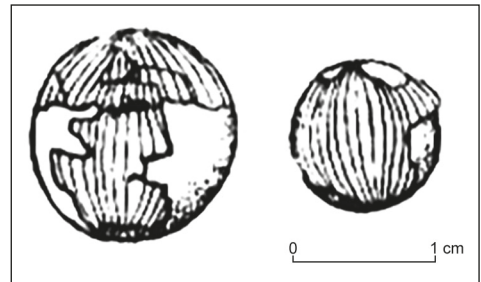


Fig. 7. Gold beads (After Kuftin 1941: Fig. 84; processing K. Pawłowska)

TEXTILES, GARMENT ELEMENTS AND JEWELLERY

The metal garment elements from the Beshtasheni burials are dated to a period for which there is very little known about the dress of either men or women. No written or sufficiently accurate iconographic sources are extant for the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age period, thus necessitating a look at the archaeological evidence of the earlier periods in order to hint at what the period dress was like.

Imprints of cloth are known from the bases of pots dating from the Early Bronze Age, whereas textile fragments were discovered in the kurgans of the Trialeti culture existing from the 3rd through the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. Decoration of the silver goblets from Trialeti in Georgia and Karashamb in Armenia

has provided data from the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. A cylinder seal, found in the Khareba cemetery, showed a human figure wearing a short belted tunic, hat and shoes with an upturned toe of Anatolian style. Nothing can be said of colors or garment style of the 3rd millennium dress. However, the 16th/15th century BC textiles from Khareba, which have been identified as being made of flax, wool and cotton, were mostly brown, blue, yellow, red and black. It may be assumed that both clothing types, as well as fabrics and colors remained largely unchanged until the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (D. Narimanishvili 2015: 266–268). The accuracy of most representations leaves much to be desired, hence the

inordinate significance of the finds from a primary context, such as the Beshtasheni cemetery, even though they do not give full insight into the garments of the period.

Men may have worn jewellery made of stone and metal (G. Narimanishvili 2010: 315, 320), but it is the women who were buried with a variety of neck adornments, e.g., necklaces composed mainly of carnelian beads and bronze bracelets of various sizes and types around wrists and ankles (Tehov 1977: 68) [Table 1]. Only wrist bracelets have been found so far in the Beshtasheni cemetery, but ankle bracelets were recorded

in a burial from Tlia (Grave 276 containing ankle bracelets, Tehov 1977: Fig. 56). This group of metal garment elements appears to have been popular mostly with women there (80% of all the presented bracelets came from the discussed cemetery).

Apart from weapons found usually near the hip bones of male skeletons (Kuftin 1941: 69), burial furnishings have included pins serving to fasten the clothing in place (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106, and discussion below). Indeed, pins were worn to fasten clothes without gender differentiation.

Table 1. *Grave assemblages of metal garment elements sorted by the gender of the deceased (female, male and unidentified) and by the burials (KUF = abbreviation used by B. Kuftin in his research)*

| Grave No. | Gender/ age (years) if known | Location in grave | Metal element | Inventory No. | First published in: |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------|---------------|--|
| 19 | Female (18–24) | On the wrist (northeastern part) | Bracelet | 2013-116 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106 [Fig. 5:a–b] |
| | | On the wrist (northeastern part) | Bracelet | 2013-117 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106 [Fig. 5:a–b] |
| | | Near the left arm and head (northeastern part) | Pin | 2013-118 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106 [Fig. 3:I] |
| 27 | Female (most probably) (20–30) | On a finger bone (center) | Ring | 2014-306 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108 [Fig. 5:f] |
| | | On a finger bone (center) | Ring | 2014-307 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108 [Fig. 5:f] |
| 1 KUF | Female? | No data | Pin | 42-64:5 | Kuftin 1941: 49 [Fig. 3:I] |
| 3 KUF | Female? | No data | Pin | 42-64:18 | Kuftin 1941: 339 [Fig. 3:II] |
| 4 KUF | Female | Northern part | Bracelet | 42-64:191 | Kuftin 1941: 281 – |
| | | Northern part | Bracelet | 42-64:34 | Kuftin 1941: 74 [Fig. 5:d] |
| | | Near the legs | Pin | 42-64:33 | Kuftin 1941: 323 [Fig. 3:III] |
| | | No data | Pin | 42-64:209 | Kuftin 1941: 323 [Fig. 3:III] |
| 17 | Male (35–40) | Near the chest (center) | Buckle ring and shank | 2013-90 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106 [Fig. 6:a–b] |
| 21 | Male (45–50) | By the arms (north-western corner) | Belt | 2013-157 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106–107 [Fig. 4:a] |

Table 1. (continued)

| Grave No. | Gender/ age (years) if known | Location in grave | Metal element | Inventory No. | First published in: | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------|---|--------------|
| 25 | Male (20–30) Female (25–30) | Above the head of the female skeleton (northern part) | Belt | 2014-281 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106 | [Fig. 4:b] |
| 29 | Male (16–20) | On a finger bone (center) | Ring | 2014-323 | D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 108 | [Fig. 5:f] |
| 11 KUF | Male | No data | Gold bead | – | Kuftin 1941: 74 | [Fig. 7] |
| | | Near the hips (center part) | Belt | 42-64:81 | Kuftin 1941: 68, 317, 329 | [Fig. 4:c] |
| | | Near the hips (center part) | Zoo-morphic buckle | 42-64:83 | Kuftin 1941: 68, 333 | [Fig. 4:c] |
| 13 KUF | Male | No data | Belt | 42-64:117 | Akhvlediani 2001: Fig. 1 | – |
| | | Near the ribs (northern part) | Buckle shank | 42-64:249 | Kuftin 1941: 329 | [Fig. 6:e] |
| | | Near the head | Pin | 42-64:108 | Akhvlediani 2001: Fig. 1 | [Fig. 3:III] |
| 19 KUF | Male? | Near the ribs (northern part) | Buckle ring | 42-64:152 | Kuftin 1941: 325 | [Fig. 6:c] |
| | | Between the head and ribs (northern part) | Buckle shank | 42-64:155 | Kuftin 1941: 73, 324 | [Fig. 6:f] |
| | | No data | Pin | 42-64:142 | Kuftin 1941: 325 | [Fig. 3:IV] |
| 20 KUF | Male? | No data | Belt | 42-64:181 | Akhvlediani 2001: Fig. 2 | – |
| | | | Bracelet | 42-64:183 | Kuftin 1941: 335 | [Fig. 5:c] |
| | | | Pin | 42-64:180 | Kuftin 1941: 73 | – |
| 34 KUF | Male | Near the chest | Buckle shank | 42-64:242 | Kuftin 1941: 67, 73, 311 | [Fig. 6:d] |
| 37 KUF | Male | No data | Pin | 42-64:265 | Kuftin 1941: 73 | – |
| | | | Pin | 42-64:264 | | [Fig. 3:III] |
| | | | Bracelet | 42-64:183 | Kuftin 1941: 335 | [Fig. 5:c] |
| | | | Pin | 42-64:180 | Kuftin 1941: 73 | – |
| | | | Pin | 42-64:241 | Kuftin 1941: 311 | [Fig. 3:IV] |
| 2 KUF | Not determined | No data | Ring | 42-64:233 | Kuftin 1941: 231 | – |
| 21 KUF | Not determined | No data | Pin | 42-64:188 | Kuftin 1941: 73 | [Fig. 3:III] |
| 32 KUF | Not determined | No data | Pin | 42-64:220 | Kuftin 1941: 339 | [Fig. 3:II] |

The presented set from the Beshtasheni cemetery includes 15 pins. Eight of them were found in male graves, five in female ones, and two came from graves where the gender of the deceased was not determined. The age of the deceased could be specified only in two cases: an 18–24 year old female burial and a 45–50 year old male burial. Pins with a well-known location within the grave were mainly situated around the head of the deceased or near the metacarpal bones placed near the facial part of the skull. Only one of the specimens hitherto discovered was found near the feet.

The different sizes and weights of the pins defy a clear functional interpretation. Some certainly were used to fasten clothes or to tie up hair (Bertman 2003: 329; Cifarelli 2014: 305; Těhov 1977: 39, 42). Pins found with male burials furnished with weapons can also be interpreted as sign of status indicating their use by members of a military elite (see, e.g., Marcus 1994: 12). Bronze rings may have been worn on the fingers. Two of the Beshtasheni rings came from male burials, and one from a female one. In one case, the gender of the deceased could not be specified.

Around the hips men, and perhaps women as well, wore decorated belts made of bronze and commonly fastened with a buckle or fringed with thongs or straps. There is no evidence, however, for the use of these belts on an everyday basis. Five have been found in the Beshtasheni burials, all apparently belonging to males. One was a 45–50 year old man (Grave 21), whose grave furnishings included two iron daggers, six bronze and five iron arrowheads and some pottery (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 106). Another was a double burial (Grave 25) of a 25–30 year old female and a 20–

30 year old male, hence it cannot be said with certainty that the male actually wore the belt, especially as it was found above the woman's head. Other finds from this burial included a very small amount of pottery, a long iron dagger and a copper/bronze pin (D. Narimanishvili, Karelidze, and Hamburg 2015: 107). The burial in Kuftin's Grave 11 KUF also yielded a belt, placed around the hips, and although the bones were not identified to gender, the grave goods, such as a bronze dagger, helmet, spearhead, and horse harness elements, indicated that the deceased was most likely an adult male. With regard to the remaining two belts, nothing definite can be said about the gender, age and position of the deceased.

Belts found at other archaeological sites include a complete specimen from the burial of a 25–35 year old male at Hasanlu (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art). The grave goods included some pottery, a bronze spear, an iron dagger, carnelian beads and bronze and iron ornaments. The burial was dated to the end of the 9th century BC (Hasanlu IVB; Robinson 2012: 394). At another Iranian site, Märlik, the gender of the deceased was not determined due to the rather poor preservation of the bones, but some of the grave goods suggest adult male burials. The graves contained, in a few cases, more than one belt and, additionally, other objects made of precious metals (Negahban 1996: 19–20 and 23–24).

The length of some of these objects defies their identification as belts, but there are belts clearly exceeding a meter in length, e.g., examples from Tlia or Adilcevaz (Kellner 1991: 73). Decorated belts from Tlia, found in burials from the 12th–10th century BC, were localized

near the waist and hips (Tehov 1980: Pl. 75), although some of them were clearly too long to function as conventional belts. Interestingly, all objects of the kind from the Tlia cemetery were recovered from male graves (taking into consideration only the burials in which gender was clearly specified).

In Urartian burials, belts were found mostly in graves of adult males, together with metal weaponry and adornments. In just a few examples, the belt was placed on the waist or hips of the deceased. Since the Urartian burial practices involve also cremation, in such cases the belts were

usually broken or bent and placed beside the urn (Castelluccia 2017: 12).

The above review of belt finds from the region and period indicates that belts were found usually in graves and that these were usually male burials. Moreover, they are usually assumed to be part of military garments (e.g., Marcus 1995: 2501). Their position in the grave depended upon the burial type. There is, however, no convincing evidence so far allowing for incontestable association of metal decorated belts with the gender of their bearers. Nor can their function be clearly defined.

SUMMARY

A study of the metal garment elements coming from archaeological excavations in the Beshtasheni cemetery has resulted in a provisional classification of the pins, bracelets, finger rings and buckle parts that make up this assemblage. A reconstruction of how these elements were worn by men and women of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, the period to which the Beshtasheni site is dated, is limited by the absence of written sources and accurate iconographic depictions. Even so, the

finds from the graves coupled with data from earlier periods can lead to certain assumptions regarding the dress code. The question remains as to the extent to which the metal garment elements from Beshtasheni were of everyday use or ceremonial in nature.

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