

KP 289 Fakhrali SCP

The Site

This site is north of the village of Fakhrali. It is on irrigated arable land, which rises very gently to a slight ridge to approximately 1km to the east of the site.

Although the general area of Fakhrali village was identified during the field survey as being of archaeological potential, this particular location was not identified at that stage. Topsoil stripping of the BTC side of the easement, in late 2003, revealed a dense concentration of pottery in the upper layers of subsoil. An xm-wide strip along the pipe centreline was excavated prior to trenching for the BTC pipe. Large amounts of pottery was found, much of it scattered in the upper subsoil layers. Other finds included glass bracelets. There were also several small 'tandir'-type ovens.

Excavation on the SCP centreline carried out between 1st March and 15th March 2005. A 12m by 4m trench was opened, opposite the point on the BTC line that had the highest concentration of finds. Three further trial 4m by 4m trial trenches were also excavated to the west.

Description of Archaeological Remains

In the central part of the main trench, against the south side baulk, a roughly circular feature with heat-affected sides and base was first visible at a depth of 45cm below the stripped topsoil surface. Above its fired base, a hard, compacted layer contained a high concentration of animal bones, including cattle and sheep, mostly crushed and fragmentary.

This feature was cut into a sequence of archaeological deposits, apparently filling a broad, irregular hollow, which occupied much of the central part of the trench. The sides of this hollow sloped up gradually to both the west and east ends of the trench. On both of these slopes, there were layers of charcoal, including the remains of large, pieces of wood. On the east side, these appeared to be squared timbers, although one piece on the west side showed the full round profile of a cut log. A large fragment of this piece was retrieve for possible dendrochronological dating, but only 26 rings could be seen, with little variation in width. The wood was identified as elm (Peter Kuniholm, Carol Griggs). These charcoal spreads continued in to the central part of the trench near to the southern baulk, but were patchy elsewhere.

The north side of the central, deepest part of the trench had a group of at least eight similar features, interpreted as tandir-type ovens. These were typically 50-70cm in diameter and were defined by partly fired clay base and sides. The best preserved had fired linings surviving to a height of 30cm, with clear patterns of incised lines on the inner side of the wall. At one point, there was an intercutting series of these features, indicating at least four phases of use.

There were a number of other identified features, mostly small and rather nondescript pits.

There was a considerable quantity of pottery, tentatively dated to the tenth to twelfth century AD and including a relatively high proportion of glazed wares. A greyware vessel, broken in situ, was in an inverted position towards the west end of the trench,

and there were also two small oil-lamps found in the same area. The central part of the trench, between the series of tandirs to the north and the isolated tander in the southern baulk, produced the remains of several large, thick-walled storage jars.

Two human skulls were also found in the same region of the site, together with a number of other human bones including a scapula and a radius. There was a ferrous metal knife blade close by.

The two westernmost trial trenches contained modest quantities of pottery and animal bone from the upper subsoil layers, but no features were identified. The third trial trench, 14m to the west of the main trench, had archaeological deposits to a depth of 1.40m, with the remains of three tander-type ovens in its northwest quadrant.

Interpretation

The archaeological remains seem to be largely the result of domestic occupation, the tander-type features having little to suggest they had any other function than baking bread or perhaps some other form of food preparation. These features were probably cut into the ground as negative features, though it is possible that their walls were built up above the ground, but either way, they are at a much lower level than the modern surface. The best interpretation of this is probably that they were within a natural hollow, perhaps affording shelter, which has since completely silted up. The undifferentiated subsoil sealing the whole site, up to 40cm deep, suggests that there has also been a build up of flood- or wind-borne deposits since the time when it was occupied.

The inter-cutting tandirs suggest that the site was used for a relatively long period, or perhaps re-used on a seasonal basis. On similar sites elsewhere on the pipeline, such as Kasaman (KP 405), tandirs tended to be discrete features respecting each other

The stratigraphic relationships of the human skeletal remains to the other features was not clear, though the burials appeared to be very disturbed and are likely to have been older features disturbed by the digging of tandirs.

The pottery in the upper layers Spreads of pottery in the upper layers, but no remains in the easternmost two shurfs, suggesting that the area of occupation is quite limited. Also monitored the machining of soil from beside the running track while bedding the welded-up pipe, and no evidence of any very extensive remains.

The remains here seem to have been deeper than those on the BTC side of the easement, though this cannot be stated with certainty, as the earlier trenches were not completely bottomed. Although rich in pottery finds, the SCP side had noticeably less finds than the BTC trenches. In particular, there were far fewer class bracelets.

Need to look at this again, when I have access to photo's!!