

KP 398 Hasan Su

The Site

This site is located on fairly flat, high ground immediately west of the Hasan Su River. Just beyond the site, the land slopes gradually to the east before falling away steeply (near vertical) to the base of the gorge through which the Hasan Su river flows.

The flat, high ground on which the site stands runs to the west, while to the north and south of the site the ground undulates, forming numerous hillocks. A track running between x and y forms the western boundary of the site.

This area is covered with sagebrush scrub and is grazed by sheep and goats. The undulating nature of the landscape here suggests that it has always been used as pasture rather than arable land.

This site was located during topsoil stripping when groups of stones were clearly visible in the stripped surface. Additional stone settings were visible on the scrub land to the south of the site, indicating that this is an extensive cemetery continuing to the south. Excavations were carried out here between 16th September and 24th October 2004. Initially excavation was restricted to a 4m wide trench along the pipe centre line, but this was later extended to 12m in width to enable all of the graves to be excavated prior to construction.

Description of Archaeological Remains

Excavation revealed 17 graves. Preservation was incredibly poor and there were strong indications that these graves had been previously disturbed.

The similarity of the archaeological deposits with the surrounding fine-grained compact substrate made it virtually impossible to determine the grave cuts, although there was evidence of discoloration in the upper layers. Spreads of stones provided the main surface indicators of these graves following the removal of the topsoil, although in some instances the removal of the stones did not reveal a burial beneath. There was a considerable variation in the depth, size and shape of these graves, although the available dating evidence and even distribution of graves across the area suggests that they are contemporary.

Human Skeletal Remains

Preservation of human bone was incredibly poor as this site, and no complete or near complete skeletons were recovered. Very few bones were recovered and these were generally flaky and fragmentary.

The absence of complete or near complete skeletons makes it difficult to draw conclusions concerning burial practices on this site. The positioning of leg bones within grave 6 suggests that this body was laid on its side looking to the south-east, with its head at the north-east end of the grave. Evidence from grave 2 however may suggest that the head was located at the north-west end of the grave, as a series of three complete vessels were located at this end of the trench.

Artefacts

A range of artefacts was recovered from these graves, pottery being the most prevalent. In addition, bronze and iron items, worked bone, beads and animal bone were recovered; the majority of these items were contained in grave 3.

Pot

Very few complete pottery vessels were recovered from these burials; the majority was fragmentary and disturbed. The pot sherds indicate that a wide variety of vessel types were contained within the graves – bowls, jars, jugs and plates. The complete vessels included two large jugs and a small two-handled urn. Decoration was evident on much of the pottery, and was typical of material dating to the Bronze Age.

Animal Bone

Although animal bone appears to have survived in greater quantities than human bone, it is still flaky and poorly preserved. The fragments are small, and in most cases unidentifiable, although it appears that sheep, cow and horse are all represented in the assemblage.

Grave 3 produced a fairly complete, partially articulated horse skeleton. Bone preservation was better within this grave and the lower layer less disturbed.

Worked Bone

Three worked bone needles were found in grave 3. Only one of these was complete, the other two were broken.

Metal Objects

Grave 3 produced a bronze spearhead, measuring approximately 5cm in length. In addition several fragments of iron were also found here, but these were broken, highly corroded, and as a result, unidentifiable.

Beads

Beads were recovered from a number of graves, with Graves 6 and 7 yielding the largest quantities. The majority of these were made of agate.

Interpretation

The burials excavated here form part of a larger cemetery site that continues to the south of the pipeline route. As with other cemeteries excavated along the pipeline, this occupies a prominent position in the landscape with wide-ranging views.

The poor preservation of skeletal remains combined with the damage and considerable disturbance to these graves has made it difficult to draw any definite conclusions about burial practices at this site. The artefacts recovered from the graves however are typical of other burials dating to the Bronze Age excavated along the pipeline route and elsewhere in Azerbaijan. The percentage of metal objects however is far smaller than at other sites. Whether this is due to the affluence of the communities represented by these cemeteries, or due to post-depositional processes cannot be determined.

The damage to the pottery appears to have occurred over a period of time as a result of erosion and subsequent compaction, although there is some evidence of more recent damage, possibly occurring during topsoil stripping.

The material in some of the graves has been heavily disturbed, and may be the result of animal burrowing, or possibly grave robbing following their deposition. Some of the material within these graves may therefore be intrusive.

Animal bones are frequently recovered from burials of this period. The presence of both cow and sheep bone within grave 13 is however unusual, as usually there is one or other present.

The fairly complete, articulated skeleton of a horse together with the arrowhead and bone pins within grave 3 suggests that this grave may represent the burial of a man with high standing in society.