

**Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences**  
**Archaeology and Ethnography Institute**

**DETAILED SCIENTIFIC REPORT**

**Excavations on the Soyuqbulaq kurgans at KP 412.1**  
**SCPX pipeline**

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# 1 SUMMARY

The report provides information on the outcome of archaeological excavations carried out between February 10, and March 2, 2017 in the Chalcolithic-era kurgans, located north of the Soyuqbulaq village of the Aghstafa district at KP 412.12 of the gas export pipeline corridor under the SCPX project. The structure of these kurgan-type monuments, the discovered archaeological samples, burial traditions and other issues were studied as a result of the excavations. The structure of the burial chambers and the finds indicate that the burials date to the late Chalcolithic period, i.e. the first half of the 4th millennium BCE.

These two kurgans are part of a larger group of kurgans, that lay over 60m to the south that were examined in 2005 as part of the BTC and SCP pipeline project. The kurgans excavated in this work (22 and 23) are numbered in sequence following the previous work, as is the ceramic grave (4).

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## **2 INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 SITE DISCOVERY**

The Soyuqbulaq necropolis, which is located at KP 412.12 of the SCPX route and consists of Chalcolithic-era kurgans, was discovered by the report author in 2004. The kurgans were recorded and listed among the monuments in the SCPX corridor where archaeological excavations would be carried out in compliance with the agreement reached by the IoAE and BP (SCPX).

### **2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE**

The Chalcolithic-era Soyuqbulaq kurgans are located at the N-4578838.668; N-4578732.3; E-8522305.62; E-8522470.346 coordinates in the territory of the Aghstafa district north of the Soyuqbulaq village at KP 412.12 of the SCPX route. The area, which has plain relief, has been used for sowing for many years.

### **2.3 TIMING OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION**

An archaeological expedition group of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy carried out excavations in the Soyuqbulaq kurgans February 10, 2017 to March 2, 2017, overseen by PhD in History, Prof. Najaf Museyibli, with the participation of the Institute's employees, PhD in History, senior research fellow Vagif Asadov and junior research associate Farhad Farmanov. An archaeologist representing BP (SCPX) contributed to the excavation work as an observer.

## **3 OUTCOME OF THE EXCAVATIONS**

### **3.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE**

The Soyuqbulaq kurgans are located north of the Soyuqbulaq village in the Aghstafa district at KP 412.12 of the SCPX route. The area has plain relief. This territory has been used for sowing for many years. The upper layer of the pipeline corridor's entire area was scraped and removed with the use of machinery when the monument was discovered in 2005.

Other kurgans were also revealed while the surrounding areas were being examined, which indicate that burials were carried out in this territory over a long period of time during the late Chalcolithic period. These kurgans lie over 60m to the south of the two kurgans described in this report. The kurgans excavated in this work (22 and 23) are numbered in sequence following the previous work, as is the ceramic grave (4).

## **4 OUTCOME OF EXCAVATIONS**

The upper cover of numerous kurgans was destroyed in the entire Soyuqbulaq necropolis due to the use of this territory as sowing areas for many years. The territory in the construction corridor where the kurgans are located has been used more intensively. Therefore, collecting data regarding the preliminary condition of the researched kurgans was impossible. Nevertheless, scholars managed to track the initial condition of the river rocks in the kurgan cover in the lower

strata during the excavations. Archaeological excavations were conducted in two kurgans located in the area. Both contained a single burial, and an empty burial jug was discovered.

### **Kurgan 22**

Only sparsely scattered stones of this kurgan cover remained on the spot. After removal of the upper soil horizon, a heap of rocks sized 2.2m x 1.6m indicating a burial chamber was discovered. As in the previous kurgans, the chamber in this kurgan was orientated in a northwest to southeast direction. The chamber was excavated to a depth of 90cm (Photo 3). Densely piled ochre remains were found at the 30cm depth at the southeast corner of the chamber, along with ochre and black ash located at the bottom of the south wall. A rim sherd of a small red coloured vessel made of clay with clean composition was discovered at the 40cm depth northwest of the burial chamber. Moreover, a human thigh and a shinbone were placed adjacently on the chamber's floor in the southeast (Photo 4). Two sets of elongated beads made of a black mineral were found in between. An elongated, flat (2.5cm thick) limestone fragment was found alongside the bones (perhaps, it was placed in the grave on purpose). No other human bones or remains of tangible culture were found in the grave.

### **Kurgan 23**

The kurgan cover was comprised of sparsely scattered river rocks. The stones were lined up densely from the depth of 30cm in the central part. Red coloured ceramic vessel fragments were encountered amid the stones. The burial chamber was discovered under these rocks and excavated at the 90cm depth. The oval chamber, orientated in the northwest to southeast direction, was sized 1.4m x 1m (Photo 5).

Fragments of a little black vessel were found at a depth of 60cm at the bottom of the east wall inside the grave. Parts of a human skeleton started to emerge at a depth of 70cm. The cranial bone was located in the southeast part. The human bones were found along with river rocks (Photo 6). The heap of river rocks became more compact toward the floor of the grave. Most of the human bones, including the skull, were found above the rocks. Red coloured vessel fragments were discovered at the same level as the bones in the grave's central part and around the cranial bone. A dark pink, flat and round-shaped stone with a smooth surface was found alongside the bones at the bottom of the chamber's northeast wall. Essentially, all the bones were scattered in a disorderly manner inside the grave. As in a number of other Soyuqbulaq graves, the bones were probably buried after becoming completely devoid of flesh as a result of rotting (or a repeated burial was conducted).

In addition, a large jug was found under a pile of river rocks sized 60x60cm at the depth of 40cm in one area (most likely, this was a collapsed kurgan cover). The orifice element of the jug, which was 50cm high and had a diameter of 40cm, lay southward and stretched on its side in the north to south direction; the vessel was surrounded by rocks. It was located over a line of flat river rocks sized 70x55cm at the depth of 85cm (Photo 7). The orifice element was covered by a flat stone. Traces of black ash were seen toward the bottom at the lower wall inside the jug (Photo 8). Several ceramic vessel graves with buried babies were recorded during the excavations on the site carried out in 2005 (Museyibli, 2008). Unlike those graves, no skeletons were found in this particular burial jug. In our opinion, ceramic vessel grave 4 is the only cenotaph grave of this type that is known to pertain to the Leylatepe culture. This burial is the most ancient cenotaph grave we are aware of in the Azerbaijani territory. The pink coloured burial jug, which had a straight orifice, was made roughly by hand using clay with sand admixture.

## **5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS.**

*Ceramics:* Such finds include tiny fragments of ceramic vessels. These are primarily red-pink coloured items and rarely black coloured samples. These vessels were made of clay with a clean composition or sand admixture. The burial jug in the ceramic vessel grave 4 is the main discovery pertaining to the ceramics revealed during the excavations. This jug was made manually using clay with sand admixture.

*Beads:* Two sets of elongated beads made of a black coloured mineral were found in Kurgan 22. One of the items was broken.

## **6 ANALYTICAL RESULTS**

The excavations in the Chalcolithic-era Soyuqbulaq kurgans 22 and 23 were completed. As a result of the excavations scientific information was collected as much as possible concerning these monuments, the relevant historical period, archaeological materials and burial customs. The conducted research allows obtaining certain data about the burial traditions observed by the region's residents during the Chalcolithic period.

### **6.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ARTEFACT MATERIAL**

A limited number of artefacts were found during the excavations conducted in the Chalcolithic-era Soyuqbulaq kurgan. However, all the finds were grouped on the basis of both their material and typological features, analysed and listed in the inventory.

### **6.2 PERIOD AND CHRONOLOGY**

The chronology of the Soyuqbulaq kurgans 22 and 23 and a ceramic vessel grave of the cenotaph type excavated on the site was determined while taking into consideration the general comparative analysis of archaeological finds and the burial monuments excavated previously at this necropolis. All these factors indicate that the excavated graves date to the beginning of the 4th millennium BCE.

## **7 DISCUSSION**

### **7.1 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

The archaeological excavations conducted on line of the pipeline were designated for rescue purposes. The kurgans were located in the pipeline corridor entirely and were therefore excavated completely. Comprehensive information was obtained regarding the kurgans' structure as a result of the excavations. Although an insignificant number of archaeological samples were found during the excavations, the finds allowed scholars to make certain scientific conclusions.

## 8 APPENDICES

### 8.1 INVENTORY

#### *Ceramics:*

1. Tiny fragments of various pottery vessels. These are primarily red-pink coloured items and rarely black coloured samples. These vessels were made of clay with clean composition or sand admixture.

2. The burial jug of the ceramic vessel grave 4. The jug was made by hand using clay with sand admixture. There are red and black spots on the surface.

#### *Beads:*

Two sets of elongated beads made of a black coloured mineral were found in Kurgan 22. One of the items was broken.

### 8.2 REFERENCES

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Museyibli, N A, 2014. *The grave monuments and burial customs of the Leylatepe culture*. Baku, 2014.

### 8.3 PHOTOGRAPHS



*Photo 1. General view of kurgan area before excavation. View to northwest.*



*Photo 2. General view of kurgan area before excavation. View to west.*





*Photo 3. Kurgan 22, excavation of chamber. View to south.*



*Photo 4. Kurgan 22, remains of human burial in chamber. View to south.*





*Photo 5. Kurgan 23 exposed, Kurgan 22 to rear. View to north*



*Photo 6. Kurgan 23, remains of human burial in chamber. View to north.*





*Photo 7. Kurgan 23, ceramic vessel grave 4 after initial cleaning. View to south.*



*Photo 8. Kurgan 23, ceramic vessel grave 4 exposed. View to south.*