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**Short Report  
Excavations of Sinig Korpu Kurgan Burial  
KP 357.7 - BTC ROW**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This Report contains the results of excavation of a kurgan-type grave discovered at Ashagi Ayibli village, Tovuz District, KP 357.7, BTC ROW. The grave produced pottery and a single bronze button. Based on the stylist study and comparative analysis of the artefactual material the site was dated to the late Bronze Age.

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## **I. Introduction**

- *Description of the BTC and SCP Archaeology Programme*

Archaeological excavations in connection with the construction of the BTC and SCP pipelines were conducted prior to, and during the construction of these pipelines. These excavations generally were carried out within the 44m wide pipeline corridor from 2001 to 2005. The archaeology programme consisted of five phases of which the first four phases constituted field investigations:

Phase I – actual and potential archaeological sites were visually identified during walkover or baseline surveys during the selection of the pipeline route.

Phase II – the sites that were identified during Phase I as archaeologically potential were tested by digging test pits and conducting small-scale trial excavations.

Phase III – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the BTC ROW.

Phase IV – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the SCP ROW.

In addition to these, all the construction activities were monitored by watching brief archaeologists.

In general, during the core Phase III and Phase IV archaeological excavations were carried out at 41 sites with thousands of artefacts discovered. None of these sites had been previously known to archaeological science.

Phase V – preparation of scientific reports on the archaeological excavations carried out during the previous phases.

- *Discovery of the Site*

The Sinig Korpu kurgan at KP 357.7 was not identified during Phase I or Phase II. The major reason was that the site was located on arable land and the archaeologists were not allowed to enter areas with standing crops during Phase I or Phase II surveys. In addition, there were no visible surface markers at the site to attract attention. The kurgan burial was discovered by a watching brief archaeologist during topsoil stripping on the SCP side of the pipeline easement in March 2005.

The site was excavated between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2005 under the guidance of Tufan Akhundov and with participation of Fuad Huseynov, both from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. The work was supervised by the BTC archaeological representatives Tom Jameson and Claire Angus.

## **II. Field and Office Methods**

- *Field Methods*

The kurgan mound was excavated by the project labour force using spades, shovels, brushes, knives and other hand tools. The height of the site above sea level was established using GPS, and an appropriate site plan was drawn up. Artefacts recovered in the course of excavations were recorded in the field logbook with brief descriptions of their morphology and indication of the depths of deposits. The finds were then field sorted and washed and afterwards, boxed and sent off to the IoAE in Baku.

- ***Office/Laboratory Methods***

All the archaeological material recovered from site was accordingly treated first at the BTC Ganja Guest House and then at the Archaeological Service department of the IoAE. Where possible the pottery fragments were mended into complete or partially complete pots. Photographs of artefacts were taken and drawings were made where relevant.

- ***Archive Disposition***

All the processed archaeological material was handed over to the IoAE special archive set up for the storage of finds discovered on the BTC and SCP ROW.

### **III. Excavation Results**

- ***Site Description***

The kurgan mound was located on the left bank of the Zayamchai River, at KP 357.7, BTC ROW, 500m north-east of Ashagi Ayibli village. The land around the site is predominantly arable. The site is located at Pulkovo coordinates 8573546, 4534477 at 325m above sea level.

- ***Description of the Grave***

The kurgan mound consisted of a heap of earth and stones slightly raised above the ground. The mound had been heavily disturbed by ploughing and recent topsoil stripping. No stone layer could be seen in the eastern part of the mound; however the remaining patch of stones suggested the kurgan was circular in shape (Figure 1). The stone layer measuring 65cm in thickness and containing occasional pottery pieces was removed and a burial chamber was exposed 1.95m below the stripped surface. This was an oval-cornered rectangular pit, 2.75m long by 1.95m wide, aligned northwest to southeast. The burial chamber did not contain human skeletal remains or osteological material.

- ***Description of Finds***

The finds are largely represented by fragments of pots made of well kneaded clay tempered with fine sand and well fired to a dark grey or black surface. In addition to pottery pieces one bronze button was recovered from the site.

#### **Pottery**

**1.** Black polished jug decorated with intricate ornamentation. The neck is decorated with wide vertical strips applied by polishing. Beneath, there are three parallel horizontal lines incised on the upper part of the shoulder. Two rows of thumbbed triangles can be seen further below. These triangles with pointed apexes facing each other are evenly spaced around the pot circumference. Six parallel running horizontal lines are incised further down on the shoulder. A geometric ornament composed of a single image of a cross and a row of straight vertical and horizontal lines applied with dark red paint around the mid section of the pot forms a pattern resembling swastika symbols. The pot is made of well-kneaded fine sand-tempered clay. Dimensions: mouth diameter – 18cm, body diameter – 31cm, base diameter – 8cm, height – 37cm (Figure 2).

**2.** Body and base fragments of a bowl made of well kneaded fine sand-tempered clay well fired to a dark grey surface. The shoulder and body are each decorated with a row of thumbbed grain-shaped depressions. There are four parallel lines incised in the area between these rows. The pot has a flat base. Dimensions: mouth diameter – 19cm, body diameter – 21cm, base diameter – 5cm (Figure 3.2).

3. Fragments of a bowl made of well kneaded fine sand-tempered clay well fired to a dark grey surface. There are three parallel incised lines around the shoulder. Dimensions: mouth diameter – 17cm, body diameter – 20cm (Figure 3.1).

4. The upper half of a jug made of well kneaded fine sand-tempered clay well fired to a black surface. The pot is decorated with six parallel running horizontal lines incised below the neck. Dimensions: mouth diameter – 14cm, body diameter -31cm (Figure 3.3).

5. Fragments of a cooking-pot made of well kneaded fine sand-tempered clay well fired to a dark grey surface. The pot is decorated with two horizontal bands of slanting combed grooves – one band on the neck, the other on the upper part of the shoulder. In between these two bands there are three parallel incised lines. The pot has a base with a notched edge. Dimensions: mouth diameter – 19cm, body diameter – 21cm, base diameter – 10cm (Figure 3.4).

### **Bronze Button**

6. The bronze dome-shaped button with a ribbon-shaped buttonhole is 2.6cm in diameter (Figure 3.5).

## **IV. Analytical Results**

### **• Interpretation of Excavation Results**

The kurgan mound of earth and stones was not fully preserved. It had been truncated by ploughing because the site is located in a heavily cultivated area.

The burial chamber did not contain human remains or osteological material which might indicate the grave had been empty from the very beginning or the body of the deceased had been dug up and the grave robbed at a later date.

Typological study and comparative analysis of the available pottery allows asserting that the local tribes inhabiting the area were very skilful in pottery-making. The swastika-like ornament on one of the pots is not only a decorative element revealing the refinement and good taste of the potter but also a symbol of the Sun representing spiritual sight and inner vision of the tribes inhabiting this area. Swastika-like symbols first appeared in Western Asia and Caucasus during the Bronze Age and were related to religious beliefs of local farming tribes.

The Sinig Korpu burial mound is thought to belong to the Khojali-Gedabey archaeological culture that developed in Azerbaijan and entire Caucasus in the late Bronze Age.

### **• Discussion and Analysis of the Results of the Work Compared with Other Sites of a Similar Nature on the Pipeline Route**

The Sinig Korpu kurgan burial is somewhat similar in nature to the burials excavated at the Zayamchai and Tovuzchai sites located at KP 356 and KP378 of the BTC ROW. The pottery wares recovered from the Sinig Korpu kurgan, Zayamchai and Tovuzchai burial sites are all characterized as belonging to the Khojali-Gedabey archaeological culture.

### **• Discussion of the Site within a Regional and National Context**

A number of sites of late Bronze Age date had been discovered and explored in various regions of Azerbaijan prior to excavations of archaeological sites within the BTC and SCP pipelines construction corridor.

### **• Recommendations for Public Education**

It would be expedient to prepare and publish an article to familiarize the scientific community and the general public with the information gained from the excavation of the Sinig Korpu kurgan.

### V. Illustrations

SINIQ-KORPU. SCP-06.

Kp-357.700

Sea level - 325 m.

Drawing by H.F.R.

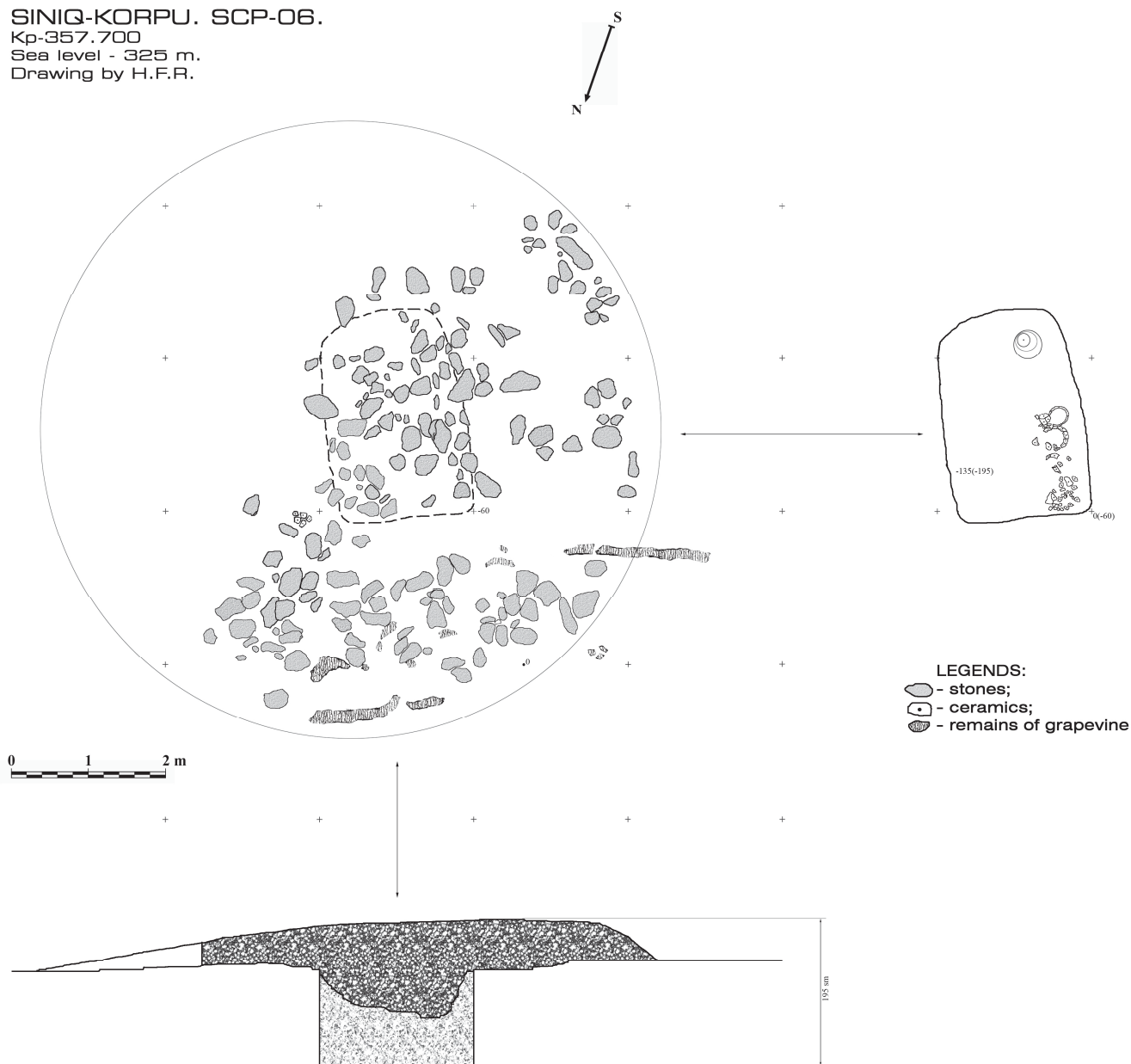


Figure 1. Site Plan

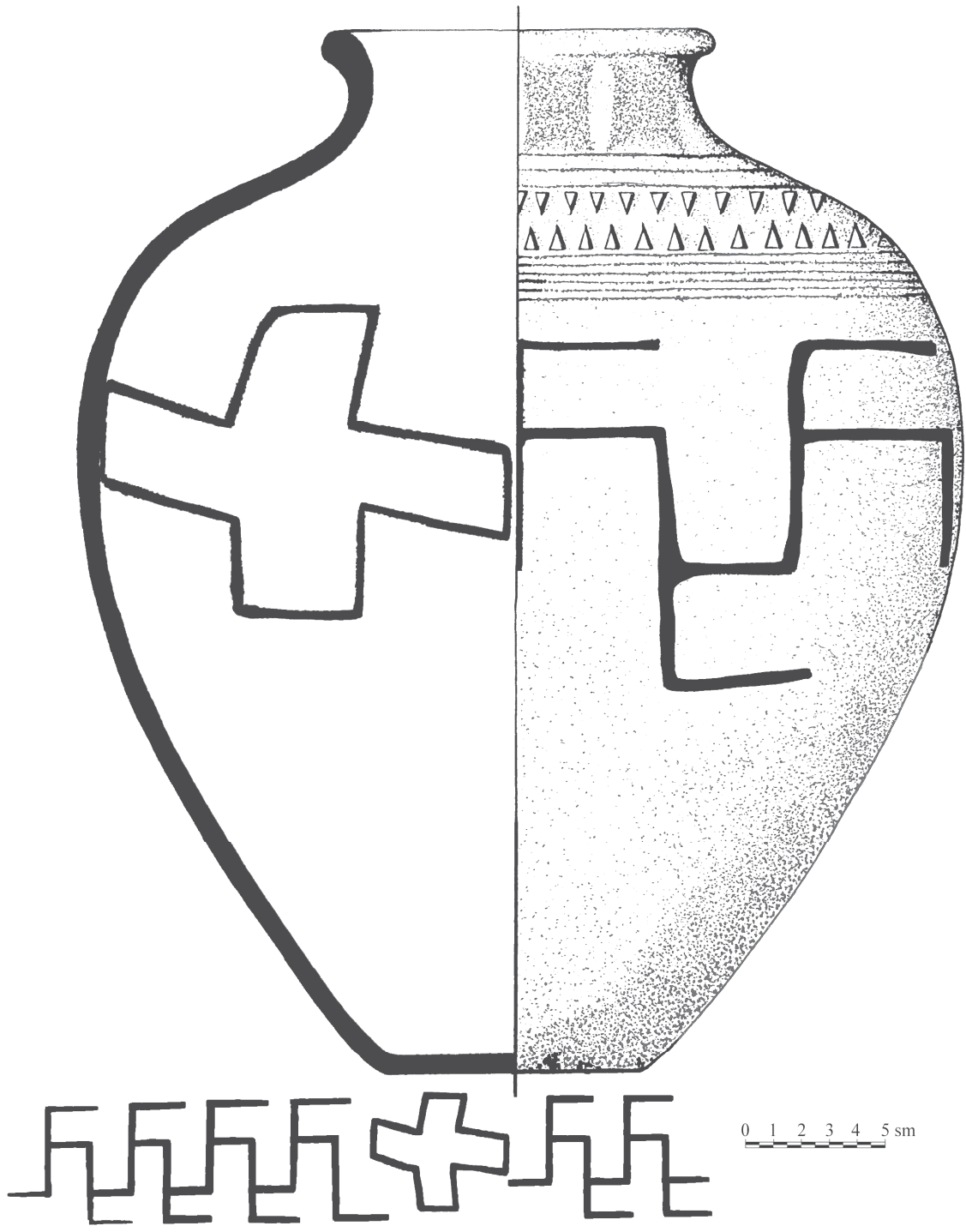


Figure 2



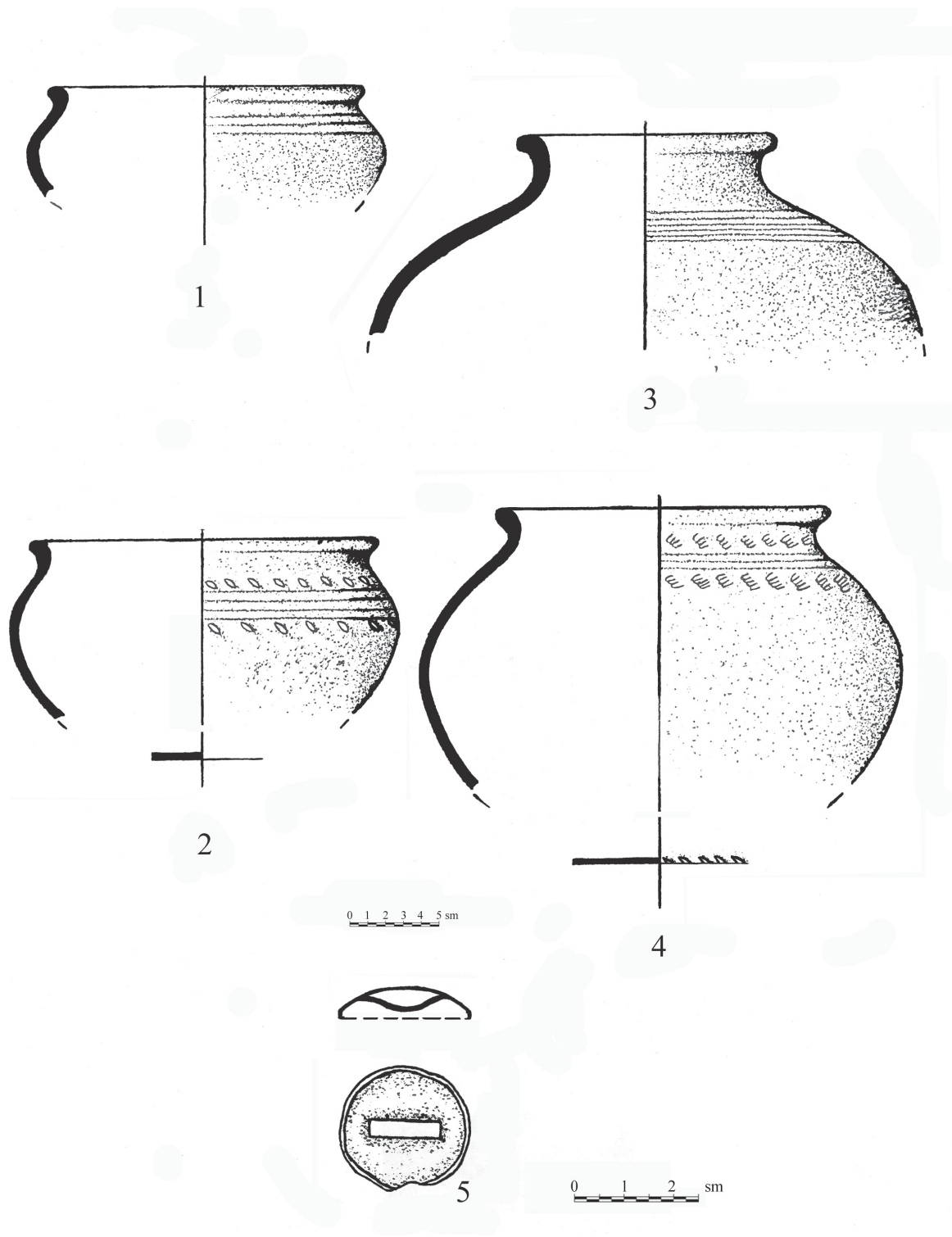


Figure 3

## VI. Inventory of Artefacts

	<b>KP</b>	<b>Type of Site</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Find</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1	357.7	kurgan	ceramic	jug	1	complete
2	357.7	kurgan	ceramic	bowl fragments	12	
3	357.7	kurgan	ceramic	bowl fragments	19	decorated with incised patterns
4	357.7	kurgan	ceramic	jug fragments	28	narrow-necked jug
5	357.7	kurgan	ceramic	cooking-pot fragments	33	decorated with combed patterns
6	357.7	kurgan	bronze	button	1	